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No. 1130
15 April –
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Gnome

A Statement from Lord Gnome, Chairman, the Pheenick Group

IT IS, of course a sad day when Britain's last great automobile manufacturer MG-Nomer has to be closed down due to bankruptcy. But let us look on the plus side. Britain is still capable of making world-class money and I and my colleagues at Pheenick can testify to the high quality of the cheques that are still coming out of MG-Nomer and into our bank accounts.

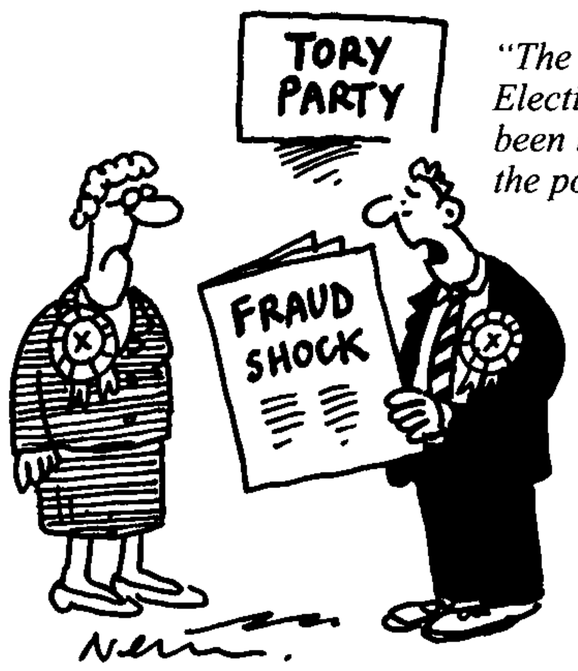
Take, for example, one of the new one-million pound cheques that I took out for a ride this morning. It went from plant-to-bank in under 5½ seconds! Impressive, eh? Not many of our foreign competitors could hope to match that performance.

So, let's hear no more about failure and instead let's celebrate the sort of achievement that makes me rich enough to go and buy a top-of-the-range Ferrari.

Lord Gnome,
c/o The Pheenick Group,
Fawlty Towers,
Birmingham.

Eye Told You So

■ **Slicker on Faulty Towers and the collapse of MG Rover 28, 29**



"The Election's been lost in the post"

EDITORIAL
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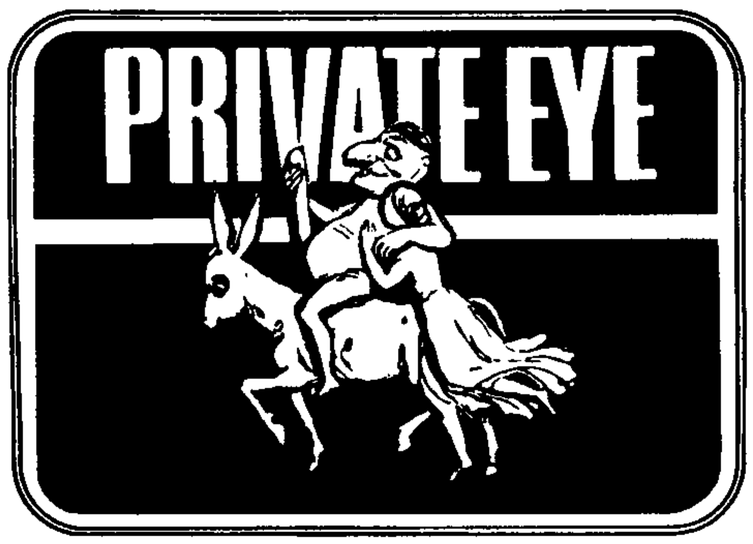
PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 0870 750 1714
Fax: 01795 414 555. Overseas: 01795 414 871
Books: 0870 750 1712 **Web:** www.private-eye.co.uk
Email: private-eye@galleon.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£21 per annum. Europe and Eire £29. Airmail (rest of world) £38. Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Display: 020 7878 2303 Classified: 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ .
Distributed by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

ABC



Bright mourning...

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THE judgment of Richard Mawrey QC on postal ballot fraud in Birmingham, in which six Labour councillors in Aston and Bordesley Green had their election overturned, was as withering as we predicted in Eye 1128.

The judge, presiding over Britain's first election court in 100 years, identified 14 ways of cheating that would "scarcely require the talents of Professor Moriarty". Summing up, he said: "Anyone who has sat through the case I have just tried and listened to the evidence of electoral fraud that would disgrace a banana republic."

Closer reading of the coruscating judgment reveals that Mawrey had deep concerns over other aspects of the 2004 local elections in Birmingham. He was staggered to discover that there had been a 100 percent increase in voting in the Bordesley Green local elections compared with the 2003 turnout, but that in Aston ward voter turnout had leapt by more than 350 percent. His conclusion has ramifications for the whole of Birmingham at a time when 70,000 postal vote applications have been made for the general election – a poll that in the wake of the MG Rover fiasco at Longbridge has major implications for a number of marginal Labour seats in the city.

Mawrey reserved some of his strongest words for the legal firm first employed by Labour to defend the Aston and Bordesley Green councillors, Messrs Steel and Shamash. "There is no doubt that attempts were made procedurally to stifle the [Bordesley Green] petitions. In particular, Messrs Steel and Shamash put great pressure on the legal services commission to refuse to continue the funding of the Bordesley Green petitioners to trial. Although I do not suggest that they stepped over the line into legal impropriety, I was very disquieted by their approach." In the event, the Labour party and Steel and Shamash withdrew legal support one week before the trial commenced. In the view of Judge Mawrey this was "inexcusable". "These gentlemen had been, in the striking phrase of one of the counsel in the case, 'left to swing in the wind'."

Ian Soggit, a barrister who agreed to represent the Bordesley Green councillors on a pro bono basis, claimed: "The case has been prepared on behalf of the Labour party rather than strictly on behalf of each individual respondent."

Labour's West Midlands regional director, Ian Reilly, has taken to not returning calls from journalists. Although Judge Mawrey was clear that the Labour party nationally was not behind the city wide rigging, Labour insiders in the city have long claimed that the pressure nationally was focused on securing the highest possible use of postal ballots – in the knowledge that the system was deeply flawed. Labour has now sent a senior member of its national executive committee (NEC), Michael Griffiths, to oversee the general election campaign in Birmingham. But should the number of postal ballots for any particular party exceed that party's majority, m'learned friends will be very busy from 6 May onwards. Special attention will no doubt be paid to the results in Birmingham Edgbaston, Yardley and Hodge Hill – won in a by-election last year with a wafer thin 450 majority by ultra Blairite Liam Byrne.

"BRUM Vote-Rigging Cover up Claim." What could be more topical? Yet the headline appeared in the *Birmingham Post* precisely four years ago, a useful reminder that dodgy ballots are nothing new in the Birmingham Labour parties.

The man at the centre of that story was Khalid Mahmood, who had just been selected as the candidate for Perry Barr and duly entered parliament at the 2001 election. He won the nomination on the strength of 140 "postal votes" from the Handsworth ward – a staggering number, given that the general ward average was about 10 or 12.

Mahmood has since distinguished himself by being voted Britain's stupidest MP by the *Guardian*, after putting his name to a piece for the *Observer* written by foreign office minister Denis MacShane.

Believing that the best way not to find evidence of corruption in your party is not to look for it, Labour did its best to turn a blind eye to the affair. But Mahmood was not reselected as the local candidate until last week – the process having been delayed because of, er, legal disputes over the membership of some branches.

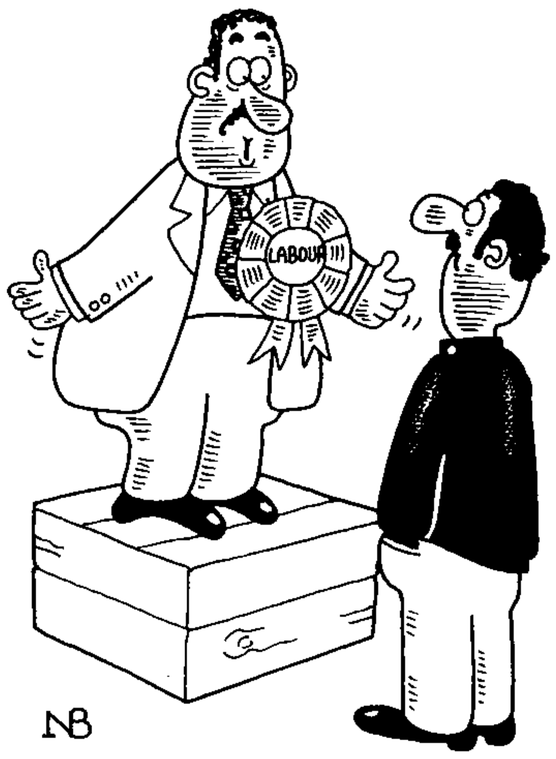
GIVEN the potential for election fraud with postal voting, residents in Tooting, south London, should pay particular attention to an appeal for votes from Labour general election candidate Sadiq Khan.

"I want to help a Labour government continue to improve the quality of life for all the people of Tooting," he writes.

And how can Tooting people help Mr Khan? Well, they could simply fill in the form for a postal vote helpfully attached with his letter. "You can vote from the comfort of your home instead of having to trudge to a polling station that is often quite a distance away," he writes helpfully.

The enclosed form does ask for a signature and an address for it to be mailed to – but then asks for the completed form to be sent to Councillor Sadiq Khan, FREEPOST LON 17692, London SW17 7BR.

No one is suggesting impropriety on Cllr Khan's behalf. But as Richard Mawrey QC revealed after exposing scandalous vote-rigging in Birmingham, a system that doesn't require independent verification of signature and that allows postal ballots to be intercepted by people other than the intended recipients might suggest the need for a little more caution on Cllr Khan's behalf.



"Because it's a secret ballot, you're not allowed to find out who you voted for"

Street Of Shame

LAST Thursday's *Sun* featured a trio of "Page 3 lovelies" wearing the colours of the three main parties – part of "a fun election feature" to "keep you abreast of election swings".

But what do these stunners – Keeley, Nicola T and Peta – have in common, other than all looking freezing cold as they pose in their bikinis on a stretch of windswept tarmac next to the paper's political hacks?

Answer: like all Page 3 regulars these days – Ruth, Danni, Krystle, Zoe, Becky, Nikkala, Neval and the oddly-named Jak – they are represented by an agency called Girl Management Ltd. Other model agents, including Yvonne Paul who discovered Samantha Fox, no longer get a look-in. All the recent winners of the "Page 3 Idol" competition are also signed up to Girl Management.

Gorgeous pouting Jak (real name Charlotte), as the *Eye* noted recently, is the 18-year-old stepdaughter of Geoff Webster, the £200,000-a-year assistant editor (pictures) of the *Sun*. Webster, fondly known as "Geordie Armani", is in charge of choosing the girls for Page 3 and models who appear in glamour shots elsewhere in the paper. He promotes his stepdaughter at every opportunity: last week *Sun* hacks even had to write a caption reporting that she has released a pop single.

But the family values don't end there. Records at Companies House show that one of the firm's two directors is a certain Alison Webster of Goudhurst, Kent – aka Mrs Geoff Webster. Every time Geoff selects a model from Girl Management, his wife's company collects a 20 percent commission on the fee – and if the girl happens to be their daughter, the family coffers are swelled yet further.

This cosy cartel has apparently been approved by editor Rebekah Wade. But others at the *Sun* are less happy, especially as the byline "Jane Stirling" now appears on some Page 3 photos. This, it transpires, is a pseudonym for… Alison Webster.

Sun staff wonder what the Dirty Digger will say when he learns how the Websters are raking off extra cash from his millions. No doubt he'll be delighted, given his enthusiasm for employing members of his own family.

Or will he?

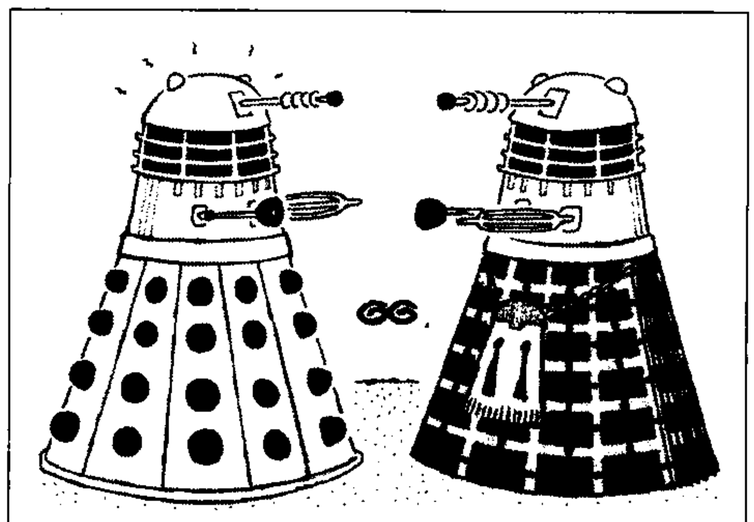
"LEE BOWYER is the nastiest piece of work in British sport – a violent, foulmouthed, horrible little lout.

"Everyone else seems shocked by his behaviour at the weekend, when he headbutted and punched his Newcastle colleague Kieron Dyer during a match. But why? Bowyer's been hitting people for years on and off the pitch, and usually getting away with it. If he worked in any other profession than football, Bowyer would have been sacked on the spot… He won't be, though."

Which Fleet Street sage might this be? Step forward Piers Morgan, who has a long history of foul-mouthed, loutish behaviour himself. Yet, far from being sacked on the spot, Moron clung on for 10 long years before the *Mirror* finally sent him packing – with a million pound pay-off.

Confirmation of Piers' abhorrence for loutishness came in his *Indie* piece last week defending the British press awards – "a seething cesspit of hatred, jealousy, drinking, fornication, fighting and general mayhem. I have always adored it from start to finish."

How delightful to see the BBC further rewarding Moron by inviting him to add his wise commentary to their in-depth coverage of the Royal Wedding.



"Expatriate! Expatriate!"

FORMER *Time Out* hack Paul Charman writes to the *Guardian* about the "shameful" British press awards.

Now professor of journalism at the London College of Communications, Charman warns that the press has become "infected with the yob culture it strives to celebrate", turning the "vital and honourable activity" of journalism into "a foul-mouthed zoo".

And who better than Charman to lament declining standards of conduct among hacks? Some *Eye* readers may recall the incident recorded here six years ago, when after a long evening's refreshment at a pub near the *Guardian* office he staggered off to his favourite massage parlour in Camden Town. First he demanded to pay the entrance fee by credit card – whereupon the receptionist pointed out that, as he should know by now, cards were not accepted. Later he emerged from a cubicle pursued by an angry young masseuse complaining that he had given her £10 for a £60 sex session.

When Charman replied that they were "all dirty slags anyway", the girls collectively evicted the seedy hack and banned him from their establishment for life.

Ah, those were the days…

WHEN Christopher Eccleston pulled out of the second series of *Doctor Who*, it was the cue for the *Daily Mail* to run one of its trademark hatchet-job profiles: "Chippy, intense, fiercely working class… The *Mail* reveals the fascinating truth about the actor."

The *Mail* went on to note that "during filming of *Doctor Who*, he was also, mistakenly, linked to his co-star Billie Piper, amid rumours that their 'friendship' had contributed to her estrangement from her husband, Chris Evans. Subsequent newspaper reports, according to a mole on set, 'incensed' Eccleston."

And where might Eccleston have read these mistaken reports? Possibly in a paper that took great delight last September in chronicling the collapse of the Evans-Piper relationship. "The gossips were adding a third name to the equation with rumours that Miss Piper's co-star in the new series of *Doctor Who*, actor Christopher Eccleston, had become 'a shoulder to cry on' as she sought to come to terms with her marriage difficulties," it breathlessly reported, and repeated the erroneous claim for good measure a few weeks later. And the name of the newspaper which "mistakenly" linked Christopher and Billie? The *Daily Mail*.

CORRECTION

Sir David Barclay and Sir Frederick Barclay

IN AN article published on page 3 of our issue of 28 November-9 December 2004 we alleged that minders employed by Sir David Barclay and Sir Frederick Barclay had recently brandished guns at an innocent holidaymaker sailing near the Barclays' Channel Island, Brecqhou.

The Barclays deny that any such incident took place. We accept that no such incident involving guns took place. We regret the errors in the article.

HOW THEY ARE RELATED

DESIGNER Bill Amberg, it seems, is a favourite with style magazine *Easy Living*.

"A perfect example is the Love-Heart key-ring £10, by Bill Amberg, that my husband snuck on my key-ring on Valentine's Day. What joy: being able to locate the keys in my bag without a mad scramble," wrote editor Susie Forbes.

Alas, the pressures of managerial responsibility prevented Ms Forbes from revealing that the husband in question was none other than, er, Bill Amberg.

Readers may recall how Bill Amberg's £210 leather bags were also praised to the skies by the "In-Vogue" section of *Vogue* magazine when the editor of the section at the time was… one Susie Forbes.

LUVVIES

Then Peter – like a laughing archer from the *Mahabharata* – lifted his bow and struck straight at the bull's eye. There is one element all religions have in common, he said. It is the pursuit of "silence" – but this is not the silence of the grave. It is the revelatory silence of expectation. This is "the silence of the Theatre".

FIONA SHAW (on Peter Brook)
The Times

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

LAST month all *Times* staff received a stern memo from managing editor Anne Spackman about the rules under which long-serving hacks are granted sabbaticals.

"They are for specific projects which will enhance both the intellectual capacity of the journalist and of *The Times*, eg writing a book on a specialist subject," she explained.

"They are not for community service or charity work, unless directly linked to the newspaper. Nor are they for language courses, unless clearly work-related. Requests for sabbaticals have to be approved by this office and the head of department and will not be nodded through on the basis that it is four years since someone last had one. Only a minority of staff are entitled to sabbaticals…"

Eight days later, by a remarkable coincidence, the *Times* carried the eye-catching headline "I'm a fed-up, unfulfilled female. Give me a break", with a two-page feature by Carol Midgley about the number of highly qualified women who are jumping off the work treadmill because their bosses won't let them take a sabbatical. "If the big companies want to halt this 'hidden brain drain' of talented employees," Midgley warned, "they may have to be more accommodating to those who want to take a breather."

Might she have any particular big companies in mind?

"Personally I think you are using too much Botox"

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

THE strain of impending marriage obviously took its toll on the Prince of Wales, as well as on Mrs Parker Bowles.

According to the *Westmoreland Gazette*, this is how Dorothy Walsh and Derek Haworth, from Blackburn, described a recent meeting with the heir to the throne in a Kendal supermarket: "He looked me straight in the eyes, shook my hand, and said they were reducing the price of chickens at half past four."

UNDER the headline "Detectives drafted in to solve mystery of the vanishing tigers", the *Observer* of 27 March had a long despatch from Amelia Gentleman about the disappearance of wild cats from the Sariska Tiger Reserve in India, described by the country's wildlife protection society as "probably the biggest conservation scandal in modern times".

Two days later readers of the *Financial Times* were treated to an almost identical piece – complete with the same details and quotes – by Jo Johnson, brother of the more famous Boris.

And no wonder: Gentleman is Johnson's wife. When the *FT* posted him to India she took up a job as New Delhi correspondent for the *International Herald Tribune*. Under the terms of her deal she can still offer pieces to the *Observer* (one of her previous employers) but only on condition that the *IHT* has first refusal.

Alas, it seems *Trib* editors didn't know about the *Observer* piece, let alone the *FT* one, and when she gave them a rewritten version later that week they decided to run it on the front page to promote the paper's "big push into Asia". Only at the last minute did an editor discover it was a retread. The story was instantly pulled.

In other newspaper offices a bollocking would ensue. The *IHT*, being refined and American, does nothing so vulgar: Gentleman has apparently been "retrenched".

"Right, children, open your books at page..."

HACKWATCH

Money For Old Pope

FITTINGLY enough, Fleet Street reacted to the Pope's death by displaying many of the great Christian gifts and virtues. Including...

† Piety

The *Daily Telegraph*'s owners, the Barclay brothers, are Roman Catholics (as was Conrad Black before them). The paper's editor, Martin Newland, is a Catholic (like *his* predecessor, Charles Moore) and a very devout one: he seriously considered becoming a priest after doing his MA in theology, but went into journalism instead via a job on the *Catholic Herald*.

The *Herald* itself could hardly have surpassed the devotional tone of the *Telegraph*'s main front-page headline on Saturday 2 April: "His faith is so full and so strong he is already touching the Lord" – printed without inverted commas, as if this were a verifiable fact, and illustrated with a huge colour photo of the pontiff releasing a white dove.

Sunday Telegraph editor Dominic Lawson is an atheist, but his wife Rosa is a devout and prominent RC, so when the Pope passed away on Saturday night Lawson knew his duty. Besides clearing 10 pages for papal tributes, he achieved the journalistic first of employing the Pope to write his editorial: the entire leader-column of 3 April turned out to be part of an apostolic letter written in 1984. It remains to be seen whether this becomes a habit. Will Lawson's pre-election editorial simply reprint the Tory manifesto?

For sheer gush, the *Sunday Telegraph* was left far behind by the Sabbath tabloids. "SAFE IN HEAVEN" was the *Mail on Sunday's* front-page splash. "IN THE ARMS OF GOD", revealed the *Sunday Mirror*. "HE RETURNED TO THE HOUSE OF THE FATHER", the *News of the World* disclosed. But Martin Newland outdid them all the next day with his front-page headline for the *Daily Telegraph*: "To Our Unforgettable Father We Say, May Angels Guide You to Paradise."

This was too much for some *Torygraph* readers. "I am horrified at your front-page headline," a letter on 5 April complained. "This is not a Catholic country. Angels and Paradise!" Still, the Barclay twins probably liked it.

† Perseverance

"A people's Pope." – *Daily Record.*
"The People's Pope." – *Daily Express.*
"The people's Pope." – *Glasgow Herald.*
"The People's Pope." – *Mirror.*
"A People's Pope." – *Daily Mail.*

† Wisdom

Although the *Daily Telegraph*'s religious reporter was already at the Vatican before the Pope's death, working alongside the paper's Italian correspondent, the editor decided that the occasion required more oomph. Step forward Middle East correspondent Patrick Bishop, who caught the next flight from Cairo to Rome. "By mid-morning at least 130,000 people had packed themselves into St Peter's Square yesterday," he reported on 4 April. "Still, there was a haunting feeling of emptiness in the huge piazza."

Only the very finest hacks can detect and record the presence of such intangibles as haunting emptiness, but Bishop has the gift: he also felt able to report that "goodness was in the air". Over the days ahead, he added, "all roads will lead to Rome" – a line that evidently pleased him. One day later he began his next dispatch: "All roads led to St Peter's Square yesterday..."

How can anyone compete with such insight? Paul Harris of the *Daily Mail* did his best. As the Pope was carried to the Basilica, he reported on 5 April, "a trail of silent tears formed in his wake" – though the accompanying photos revealed no such puddles. He also had some startling news about the rosary beads and crucifixes which pilgrims pasted to the walls with candle wax: "One small wooden crucifix on a decorative chain was so old it had been worn smooth by a lifetime of caresses between thumb and forefinger. Now, like the Pope himself, in the Catholic faith, it had moved on to another life."

† Faithfulness

"A hard act to follow." – *Mirror.*
"A hard act to follow." – *Liverpool Daily Post.*
"A hard act to follow." – *Daily Telegraph.*
"A hard act to follow." – *Northern Echo.*

Special blessings to the *Yorkshire Evening Post* for working the week's two big clichés into a single headline: "The People's Pope Hard Act to Follow."

† Modesty

"In the entire annals of the Church, it is hard to find a more formidable, a more memorable or a more lovable figure." – *Daily Telegraph* editorial, 4 April.

† Hope

During the two papal conclaves of 1978 Fleet Street ran a campaign to talk up the chances of Britain's Cardinal Hume, led by his former Ampleforth pupil Hugo Young of the *Sunday Times*. This time round the flag-flying duties fell to veteran religious pundit Clifford Longley.

"The man the cardinals will soon be voting for is more likely to be in his sixties or seventies," he wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 3 April. "This may at first seem a somewhat indelicate approach, but it does lend credence to the surprising rumour – and one that is a surprise to himself, certainly – that Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, is considered *papabile* by some of his eminent colleagues... The Englishman with an Irish name and accent, and incidentally with impeccable ecumenical credentials (and in reasonably but not fantastically good health), could have wide appeal."

The divine vision of a British Pope was such manifest fantasy that even our most patriotic newspapers refused to follow it up. But Longley's simple faith will surely be rewarded in heaven; and indeed sooner than that, when cheques arrive for his amazing triple whammy of 2,000 words for the *Guardian* on Saturday 2 April, another 1,000 words in the *Sunday Telegraph* on 3 April and yet another 1,000 words in the *Indie* on 4 April.

† Prudence

One name that could have been expected to surface last week was that of Cardinal Bernard Law, the former Archbishop of Boston who protected child-molesting priests – a scandal that prompted 400 lawsuits and has cost the American Catholic churches more than $570m in compensation. Two years ago, under threat of prosecution, Law fled US jurisdiction to Rome, where the Pope welcomed him warmly and gave him a prestigious sinecure as Archpriest of the St Mary Major basilica. The disgraced Law remains a member of the college of Cardinals and will therefore help choose the new Pope.

An interesting detail? Apparently not. In all the countless eulogies and despatches from the Vatican last week, not one British hack saw fit to mention it.

† Diligence

"As Tony Blair sets off for St Peter's this morning, he must look at the millions thronging the streets of Rome and envy Pope John Paul II... The two men enjoyed remarkable similarities when they became leaders. Both came to power after the sudden, premature death of their predecessors. Both were young, vigorous outsiders... One had his popemobile, the other his people carrier... John Paul II went skiing; Mr Blair played football... They both embraced technology... [*and so on for 1,000 words*]" – Alice Thomson, *Daily Telegraph*.

THOUGH taxpayers still aren't allowed to read the report on crime reduction written by Lord Birt, in which Tony Blair's blue-sky thinker "thought the unthinkable", at least the public now has a clue to the source of his inspiration.

The former BBC chief went to the home office with no track record in crime or anti-social behaviour; but no doubt he has got up to speed on these important issues during his affair with Eithne Wallis, the former head of the probation service for whom he is now ditching his wife.

Ms Wallis is credited with having presided over the probation service's costly IT fiasco and a £20m budget overspend, not to mention a huge expansion in bureaucracy which saw staff at the national directorate rise from 90 to 460 while there were shortages in frontline services. She then became "director for change" at the disastrous National Offender Management Service (Noms).

For the full picture of Birt's unthinkable thoughts, Joe Public will just have to whistle. The home office has finally decided that it *isn't* obliged to release the crime reduction report under the freedom of information act. This follows a request from the Crime and Society Foundation, an independent think tank based at the Kings College, London, asking to see the report and another on anti-social behaviour written while Birt was at the home office.

Officials say they do not hold the anti-social behaviour report and are not prepared to release the one on crime because it would not be in "the public interest". "Publication is likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs by inhibiting the free and frank provision of advice," said Fay Johnson of the home office's crime reduction and community safety group. Ministers need space to "think the unthinkable" without fear that their discussions will be released. She said "experts" might be reluctant to come forward in future if their contributions were disclosed.

The think tank is to seek a review of the decision and is prepared to appeal to the information commissioner.

THERE have been more allegations of gerrymandering in the West Midlands, as "new" Labour hurried to fill the vacancies created by the last minute retirement of Ross Cranston MP in Dudley North and Dennis Turner MP in Wolverhampton South East.

This time it wasn't sacks full of postal votes at issue, but in both constituencies a manipulation of the short listing of candidates by a special Labour NEC panel. Given the earlier NEC decision in favour of all-wimmin shortlists of candidates in seats vacated by late retirees, the comrades imagined that local favourite Rachel Harris would be shortlisted and likely selected as Labour's standard bearer in Dudley North. They were surprised to discover that Ian Austin, a special adviser to chancellor Gordon Brown, was being talked of as the next candidate before the process had even begun. Austin was further favoured by being the only male among the shortlisted candidates – and duly won.

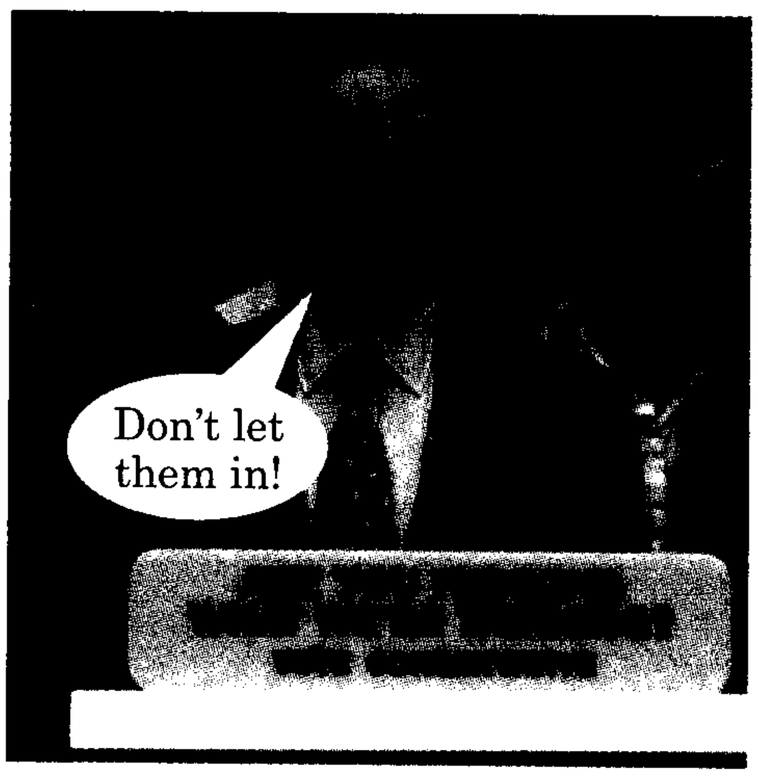
There was also a set-piece fix in Wolverhampton South East where – miraculously – a key aide to Tony Blair, Pat McFadden, was "chosen" by the comrades. Furious party members claim that both Austin and McFadden were handed lists of the dwindling membership in the constituencies to help them on their way!

LABOUR is breathing a sigh of relief now that the danger of losing one of its safest seats on 5 May has been averted.

Peter Law, a highly respected party activist, was all set to fight Blaenau Gwent as Independent Labour in protest at the party's foisting of Blairite Maggie Jones on to a constituency once represented by Nye Bevan and Michael Foot. Then on Sunday 3 April he was diagnosed with a brain tumour and taken to hospital.

Law, who had been expelled from the party when he went public, was favourite to win with the backing of disaffected activists. Now that he's out of the frame, Ms Jones, a member of Labour's national executive committee, will have an easy ride thanks to the 19,313 majority bequeathed by retiring Leftie Llew Smith who reckons Law would have pulled it off.

A statement from the Labour's Welsh HQ expressed sorrow at the turn of events and offered to keep the door open for the man it had previously slagged off to return to the fold. Labour controls the Welsh Assembly by a majority of one, putting Law, a member of the 60-seat body since it was set up six years ago, in the kingmaker's chair.



MANY Labour supporters in Michael Howard's Folkestone constituency are toying with an intriguing possibility: that they might give Tony Blair a slap over Iraq *and* unseat the Conservative leader at the same time.

This deeply satisfying double whammy could be achieved if enough Labour supporters vote tactically for the Lib Dem candidate. In 2001 the combined Labour and Lib Dem vote was more than 3,000 greater than Howard's, with the Lib Dem taking the lion's share of the anti-Tory vote.

Many Labour supporters are deeply unhappy with their candidate in Folkestone. Maureen Tomison, 63, was for more than 40 years a dedicated member of the Conservative party until she joined Labour in 2001 in protest at her party's Euroscepticism. She unsuccessfully stood for the Conservatives in both the elections of 1974 – in Dundee West in February and Norwich South in October.

In the 1990s she chaired a PR company, Decision Makers (DM), whose co-director was Conservative vice-chairman Dame Angela Rumbold. Both took advantage of the access this gave clients to influential Tory ministers.

Rumbold was forced to resign from DM after the first Nolan inquiry into standards in public life in 1994 barred MPs from being paid lobbyists. She then lost her parliamentary seat in the 1997 election, but not before helping Tomison get on the Conservative shortlist for Sevenoaks.

The prospect of defeating *two* Tories in the same seat may prove just too tempting for many Labour supporters to resist...

FOLLOWING George "I am for human rights" Galloway's silence on, er, human rights abuses during his visit to Bangladesh (*Eye* 1129), more evidence comes to light of his steadfast commitment.

A Commons early-day motion condemning human rights abuses in Burma was the second-best supported EDM in the parliamentary session that has just ended, with 289 MPs adding their names. It expressed support for Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and called on the British government to put Burma on the agenda of the UN security council.

Members from across the political spectrum were represented, with even Clare Short and Anne Widdecombe joining forces on this one. In fact, with the exception of Sinn Fein, who don't take their seats and so can't sign EDMs – although they have said they support this one – MPs from every political party but one signed up in support of democracy and human rights in Burma. The name of that party? Respect. The name of the only Sir-I-Salute-Your-Indefatigability party MP is, of course, George Galloway...

AS THE office of fair trading (OFT) investigation into the big supermarkets rumbles on with a call for evidence of malpractice (which suppliers have felt too intimidated to reveal), the all-party small shops group of MPs has suggested that there should be an ombudsman to deal with complaints against the stores.

As things stand, suppliers and convenience stores that believe they are being unfairly squeezed by the giant chains have nobody to turn to. But corner shop owners and small producers should not get their hopes up for better regulation.

Government policy on supervising anything is firmly dictated by the recent review of all regulation by David Hampton, whose conclusion was that, when it comes to regulation, less is definitely more. And Hampton is unlikely to be persuaded to toughen his stance against the big supermarkets – his day job being, er, chairman of Sainsbury's.

The supermarket unilaterally extended the time it takes to pay its suppliers but, following complaints to the OFT from the national farmers' union and the fresh produce consortium, has since written to them offering some "flexibility". Big deal.

IN A leaked memo before the last election, Tony Blair wrote that he wanted to be associated with "tough measures on asylum", especially "highlighting removals" – ie sending people back to often extremely dodgy countries of origin. But Blair will probably come to regret this as 35 cases of assault are now going through the courts – against the private security companies hired to remove people from this country.

While the private asylum security business has multiplied without proper scrutiny, penalties for "failed removals" have cut into companies' profits, encouraging them to cut corners in the ugly business of, er... booting people out of Britain.

SCOTTISH WIND

WHEN a bunch of celebs, including Magnus Magnusson and *Changing Rooms* designer Anna Ryder Richardson, threw their weight behind a pro-wind farms campaign in Scotland, Scottish Tories were quick to snipe.

Alex Fergusson MSP, Tory spokesperson for forestry and agriculture, called for a moratorium on wind farms until the Scottish Executive devises a properly coordinated strategy. He said: "I am not surprised that three-quarters of those surveyed are not anti-wind farms. The reason for that is that they will never have to live next to one."

Villagers in Barr, close to Fergusson's farmland in south Ayrshire, will have to live next to one. Fergusson is to earn £250,000 by siting the biggest wind farm in Britain on his land. The MSP received a one-off payment of £27,000 in December and will receive a guaranteed minimum of £210,000 from Scottish and Southern Energy over the next 25 years.

EYE TOLD YOU SO

AS Gordon Brown's sums come under intense scrutiny in the election campaign, the rest of the media is finally waking up to a story first reported by the *Eye* a couple of years ago: the multi-billion-pound threat to the exchequer from claims that Britain's company tax rules breach European law.

Last week's pronouncement from the European court of justice's leading advocate – that Marks & Spencer could have tax relief in Britain for losses it made in Europe – is likely to generate a £30m windfall for the company. But the real cost will come from the precedent this decision sets for the "group litigation order" through which scores of multinationals are hoping to piggy-back on the M&S case.

As reported by the *Eye* as long ago as 2003, and now authoritatively predicted by any number of "experts" (mostly accountants seeking to drum up business), the final cost from all the companies' claims is likely to run into billions. This could leave the exchequer with a far, far bigger hole in the public finances than even the £12bn or so current foreseen given Gordon Brown's spending plans.

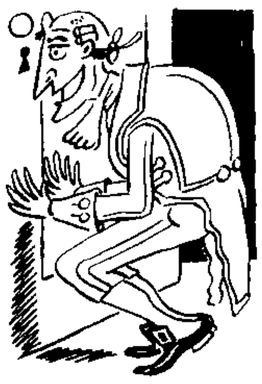
None of the "experts", nor the papers who quote them, have been keen to identify the claimants who stand to receive these large rebates despite the *Eye* having exposed them (after resistance from the solicitors coordinating the claims, Dorsey and Whitney).

In the interests of openness, among the better-known multinationals about to share in the multi-billion pound payout include Asda, BT, Lloyds TSB, Pepsi and Shell. Those hoping to gain under GLOs challenging other aspects of British tax law include Sainsbury's, Prudential, Cadbury Schweppes and British American Tobacco.

In a grilling by the public on Sky News, the Prime Minister said he was recruiting overseas dentists to fill the gaps.

The Times

COURT CIRCULAR



SIR MICHAEL PEAT was responsible for a number of fiascos surrounding the wedding, starting with the mix-up over the venue.

As Clarence House limped from one crisis to another, it was left to Paddy Harverson, Charles's chief spinner, to explain – repeatedly – that there wasn't really a crisis at all. Harverson, whose star is in the ascendant, will shortly be rewarded with a thank you letter, a bottle or two of something pleasant and a nice bonus in his pay packet. Peat, whose resignation is near, doesn't appear on Charles's list of thank you gifts.

Perhaps the hapless Peat's greatest disaster was to fail to deliver the wedding on the "right" date. While sending out Harverson to assure the world that the date of the papal funeral would have no effect on the royal nuptials, Peat was struggling to persuade most significant figures to agree with him. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury (christened "Grizzly" by Philip) told Peat that his first duty was to the whole Anglican communion and that he would be going to Rome.

It took Tony Blair – who also was desperate to go to Rome to boost his ecumenical credentials and world statesman image – to intervene directly. He advised the Queen to change the date. Brenda's Private Secretary, Sir Robin Janvrin, wrote to Peat, and Peat had to give in. Telling Charles, fragile after his stagfest in Klosters, was not a pleasant experience.

'Flunkey'

PFI NEWS

WS Atkins is the latest PFI company to sell one of its major contracts to the Secondary Market Infrastructure Fund (SMIF), an opaque outfit run by private equity group Star Capital Partners.

Announcing the sale of its stake in Mercia Healthcare, the company that runs Hereford County hospital, Atkins chief executive Keith Clarke declared that walking away from the 30-year contract was "in line with our strategy to recycle cash invested in PFI project companies at the appropriate time".

SMIF, noted more for its ability to make money than to run public services, has now acquired a number of schools and hospitals on what is known as the "secondary market". This market allows firms that were selected to own and run PFI facilities to sell them on to anybody without any regulation at all, as first explained in Paul Foot's special report *P.F.Eye* last year.

At long last the government has been questioned on the big sell-off, with Labour MP Frank Field asking how many PFI sales there have been in this market and what the value of them is. Outgoing treasury chief secretary and PFI champion Paul Boateng was forced to admit that the government doesn't have a clue on either count, glibly assuring Field that "the government undertake PFI for reasons of value for money, and the value of secondary private sector equity sales does not change the value for money case or the unitary charge paid for an individual project".

The *Eye* has revealed how private equity owners buy stakes in PFI deals to get high, government (ie taxpayer) backed returns. Many are open about squeezing costs to increase profits, with obvious consequences for quality of service and value for money. But in the interests of creating the all-important secondary market in schools and hospitals, so contractors like Atkins can make a quick buck and move on, the government would clearly prefer to turn a blind eye to any awkward issues about who ends up owning them.

NO MATTER how dire things get for a PFI company and its long-suffering public sector clients, those at the top rarely suffer undue hardship. Despite losing money hand over fist, the worst PFI company of all, Jarvis, is proof of this.

"What did you earn at school today?"

After finalising a desperate rescue package for his firm, involving selling off anything of any value, Jarvis chief executive Alan Lovell declared that the deal "draws a line under Jarvis's troubled financial history and enables us to focus on the future development of our promising core businesses of rail, roads and plant hire".

Only a cynic would suggest that this might have been a less than objective assessment of the situation from a man who immediately pocketed a £450,000 bonus, on top of his £375,000 salary and generous pension, for the "successful" restructuring.

Two months later, everything in the Jarvis garden is looking, er, not quite so rosy, with the company having discovered some unspecified and hitherto unknown "working capital" requirements, forcing its bankers to stump up another £17m. Investors saw their shares tumble again on the news of further trouble, this time by around 30 percent, and the company's remaining PFI customers face renewed uncertainty over their schools and hospitals.

"There is a huge demand for healthy, homegrown fruit 'n' veg for people to pelt Michael Howard and Tony Blair with"

Number crunchings

52 ■ One-to-one chats between Tony Blair and disgraced *Mirror* editor Piers Moron, 1997 to 2004

0 ■ One-to-one chats between Tony Blair and sports minister Richard Caborn, 2001 to 2005

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WITH Turkey due to start accession talks with the European Union this autumn, it might have been prudent for Turkey to reform its human rights record and do nothing to rock the boat.

But then Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is a thin-skinned chap who balks even at the mildest cartoon.

After the Turkish satirical magazine *Penguen* ran a cartoon portraying Erdogan as a cat, the cartoonist, Musa Kart, was taken to court and fined 5000 lira (£1,700). The case drew attention to Turkey's recently drawn up (and much praised) criminal code that contains clauses that prohibit journalists from "insulting the state", not to mention numerous other vague phrases that over-zealous prosecutors can seize upon.

The shabby treatment of Musa Kart provoked strong reaction among other Turkish cartoonists and Erdogan has now been portrayed as everything from a lion to a giraffe. More lawsuits are pending and *Penguen* faces a fine of more than 40,000 lira (£8,500) that could force its closure.

For now the EU is only making grumbling noises about Turkey "slowing down the pace of reform"; but these antics, combined with the savage beating of women demonstrators on National Women's Day on 8 March, don't bode well for the accession talks in October.

TV

The Death And Funeral Of Pope John Paul II *(All Channels)*

THE standard comparison for the television coverage of John Paul II's end has inevitably been the demise of Diana. But, while the disruption of the schedules and hagiographic tone are similar, the circumstances of the transmissions could not be more different.

No one in August 1997 expected Diana to die and especially not to die in Paris, meaning that the early coverage was shocked and improvised. But, in the case of Il Papa, the networks had been renting real estate in Rome for at least 10 years and teams of reporters had been camped at the Vatican for the several weeks since the pontiff had been admitted to hospital with flu. So, for this international obituary coverage, everything was ready. Except, as it turned out, the story.

It's an old rule of 24-hour news coverage that a watched pot never boils. The rhythm of a news story doesn't respect network schedules. The clear assumption of the programmes which began with the Vatican announcement on the night of Thursday 31 March was that JP II would go that night. In fact, the anchors and correspondents who went into emergency rolling coverage were required to keep talking for another 48 hours.

At some point the BBC teams were obviously told to be careful not to speak about the Pope in the past tense, so that, bizarrely, a commentator on News 24, during a biographical package, declared "The Pope *is* born in Krakow in 1920", seeming to be announcing, 85 years too late, the opposite of the expected news.

Throughout the Saturday afternoon, increasingly worn-out broadcasters clung to the fact that the Vatican press office had scheduled a press conference for 6pm Italian time. On Sky News, Jeremy Thompson started counting towards it: "That statement expected in seven minutes now."

When no announcement had arrived half an hour past the deadline, the presenters became visibly irritated. But perhaps the delay meant that... well, how to put it without offending those Catholics tuning in? Thompson turned to the American priest beside him: "Father, do you read any significance into the delay in this statement?" The cleric from the US nodded: "I believe that it means closure in this story."

But, after another 20 minutes, the statement finally came and said only that the Pope was no better, he was much the same. Though the priest had found a useful euphemism for death ("closure" was suddenly picked up enthusiastically by Sky reporters), there was no possible euphemism for expressing the wish that the old man would get on with it.

When closure finally came about two hours later, the networks relaxed, suddenly having at least four proper news stories: the queue, the likely new pope, the clash with Chas & Cam's wedding and then, finally, the funeral itself.

During the final illness, the coverage had been reverential: on Sky News, a priest ended his contribution by saying a prayer to take us up to the news, so that it was like being a viewer in Ireland, the Angelus being sung before the news. But, post-closure, the level of piety became so high that it seemed as if Vatican Radio had suddenly taken over all the world's wavelengths.

On all channels the presenters seemed terrified of giving offence. A post-Paxo culture of television presentation in which hosts sneer and gurn knowingly when a politician gently suggests that his party might slightly have improved the NHS suddenly gave way to hours of programming in which astonishing supernatural claims were accepted with a sympathetic nodding.

During BBC1's funeral coverage, the RC Archbishop of Birmingham first declared that all the saints in heaven would be joining in with Cardinal Ratzinger's prayers and then revealed that, according to a Polish legend, the Pope would have "been carried straight to heaven on the back of the risen Christ" because he had died during the "octad of Easter." Huw Edwards, who would have known the proper response ("Come on") if a junior minister had started talking about economic miracles, had no idea what to do with this stuff and so fell silent.

Edwards, who used the curate-ish euphemisms such as "sharing the gifts" for communion, had nervously asked the purple hat from Brum: "Archbishop, do you expect it to be a *very long* service?" It was, and during musical or spiritual longueurs in the service, presenters and reporters found themselves having to pad.

The trick was to include every possible fact your researchers had given you ("the thurible in which incense in burned") and to make each sentence as detailed as possible. Offered on his monitor a shot of the coffin, Alistair Stewart on ITV1 first listed all of the Pope's earthly hobbies ("a sporting man, who loved his walking, his skiing, his football") and then all of the ailments that had taken him away: "Stricken by Parkinson's Disease, by blood poisoning, by heart disease." Luckily, before he got to the swollen prostate, the mass resumed. Stewart was so affected by the atmosphere that he increasingly delivered his comments in the style of Gregorian plain-chant. "This was a Pope who knew the God of Abraham," he intoned.

The pictures couldn't help but be brilliant: the white of the buildings, the scarlet of the cardinals, the black of the secular mourners. It was the words that were the problem.

Over on BBC1, a nun called Sister Rita was telling elaborate anecdotes about the late Pope's "great sense of humour." Introduced to a Sister Rioja from Spain, he had said "a very good wine." Though not very funny, the story was at least appropriate because it's a term from viniculture that best describes the coverage of what Huw Edwards called "The Pope's passing": a very long finish.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

SENIOR programme editors across the BBC are being shown a badly edited video of a "presentation" designed to explain "the new myth" of the BBC and clear up any confusion over why 20 percent of its programme makers must now be made redundant.

Using wipe-boards covered with buzzwords like enrichment and empowerment, as well as child-like drawings of "Anna Analogue" and "Digital Joe", an American "facilitator" and "thought-provoker" tells the BBC it can no longer exist as a mere public service broadcaster.

It must now, he says, "embrace a new myth" by becoming a "hybrid public value content distributor" instead. Note the deletion of the word "broadcasting" from this vision. In-house programme making has suddenly become much less of a priority.

So who is this guy? He is Herman Gyr and he is not a broadcaster. His US company, Enterprise Development Group, serves up almost identical psycho-babble at $12,000 a time to companies with "a fear of complex change": fisheries, "beverage industries", hotels and hospitality, but not, until now, a public institution like the BBC.

IN ANOTHER crappy video, BBC staff are being invited to enjoy a celebration of its digital output, including online projects like *People's War*, an internet diary of memories of the Second World War.

The message is that all BBC programmes are going to have to be far more "interactive" in future. The audience, rather than the programme-maker, should decide what goes into a programme and how it is edited. "In fact we're very proud not to check our facts," says the editor of *People's War* in a voice over that has provoked gasps of astonishment.

The view of those watching is that the BBC may have won the argument for keeping the licence fee in 2006, but it has surrendered any case for its retention in 2015.

DOES anyone pay attention to what's on ITV? According to an item on the BBC News website on 1 April, no.

A report suggested that up to 700 ITV production staff were due to stage walk-outs on 7 and 8 April. "Unions warned the strike, at centres across the UK, could disrupt popular shows such as *Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway* and *Emmerdale*. But ITV has said it is unlikely viewers will notice any difference."

THE BBC SPENT £ MILLIONS OF LICENCE PAYERS' MONEY...
TO LURE HIM AWAY FROM CHANNEL 4...
WITH THE PROMISE OF FINDING SOMETHING ORIGINAL & ENTERTAINING TO PUT HIM IN...
SO...
Strictly DANCE FEVER
THEY STUCK HIM IN THIS INSTEAD
KenPyne

PINEWOOD Shepperton, the company that owns both of Britain's major film production centres, expanded its empire yet further this month by buying up Teddington Studios.

Teddington has been used regularly by the BBC in recent years, for instance for *The Office*. That would, of course, be the same BBC chaired by Michael Grade, who also chairs Pinewood Shepperton… and now Teddington.

Even before the Teddington takeover, Pinewood Shepperton's PR team was boasting of the many contracts the studios are attracting from the BBC, including *Test the Nation* and a seventh series of *The Weakest Link*. That'll be a great comfort to BBC staff as they wait to see if they're to be made redundant in order to free up more money to make more programmes in places like Pinewood Shepperton or Teddington.

ELECTION ADWATCH 2005

ARE YOU thinking what we're thinking? That the Tories' election posters are insanely irritating?

Or maybe you're thinking that Labour's effort, "warning" voters that "the Tories will cut £35bn from public services", has lost its lustre now that the extent of the cuts, the timing of the cuts and indeed the very meaning of the word "cut" have been pummelled into incoherence by the Howard Flight debacle.

Or perhaps you're thinking: "What on earth has happened to the Lib Dems' posters? Oh yes: they blew all their advertising budget a few weeks ago with those full-page press ads no one now remembers."

Whatever you're thinking, of the two parties with the money to sustain a national advertising campaign, the Tories' opening burst looks a shrewder piece of work. *Eye* 1127 noted how election advertising is not regulated, meaning that posters making claims about figures and facts are about as trustworthy as government dossiers on, say, Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

The public, already suspicious of politicians and bored by their rent-a-stats, pay little heed to numbers like the 35 billion in Labour's supposed jaw-dropper. Sensibly, then, the Tories have stayed away from figures and comparisons. One reason for this might be that theirs don't add up. Another, however, suggests the hand of Saatchi at work – the open questions on the Tories' posters allow them to be non-committal about whatever it is they *are* thinking, while providing rhetorical grist to the mill for a public disaffected with Blair.

The odd thing is that both parties persist in using advertising at all. A study by a New York brand consultancy, Brand Keys, during last year's US election, found that Kerry and Bush's combined $300m ad campaigns had no effect whatever on voter perception of either candidate.

DUMB BRITAIN

National Lottery Jetset Live, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: In Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting The Last Supper, how many people were depicted?

Contestant: 40.

Holmes: Which European airline's name is made up of three consecutive letters from the alphabet?

Contestant: [Blank stare.]

Holmes: You know. From the alphabet. Three letters in a row.

Contestant: Aer Lingus.

BBC Radio Norfolk

Presenter: Which country did the Panama hat originate from?

Contestant: Luton.

MAN IN THE EYE

GIOVANNI DI STEFANO

"YOU can imprison the body, but not the talent that is Jonathan King." For once, the words weren't those of King himself but of his legal "adviser", Giovanni di Stefano. He went on to claim: "I am certain he will be vindicated. There are grounds for appeal on a technicality."

Di Stefano's familiarity with judicial processes may be tenuous but he is certainly no stranger to dubious causes. Last year, it emerged that Saddam Hussein had added the ludicrous Italian "lawyer" to his defence team. The ubiquitous di Stefano then wasted no time in pleading the Iraqi dictator's case to the press. "We shall want to hear the testimony of not just George Bush Junior. Maybe even Senior. Rumsfeld, for sure."

He also confided to the *Mirror* that he would be hand-delivering a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* to the jailed tyrant, helpfully explaining that "he greatly admires the book and the central character who rights a wrong".

It is not clear how many wrongs di Stefano has righted himself. In January 2004 he resigned as a director of Dundee football club, having fallen out with owners the Marr brothers when the club went into administration. Di Stefano was forced out after the Marrs claimed his continued presence on the board "precluded the club from obtaining short, medium and long-term finance". This was all very different from the heady days of August 2003 when he had pitched up, promising to invest as much as £26m. Alas, Dundee fans saw scant evidence of this investment. An earlier attempt to buy Northampton football club had already ended in failure.

It was also in January last year that a British court first queried his legal credentials. Rejecting an appeal on behalf of timeshare fraudster John "Goldfinger" Palmer against a £2m compensation order, Lord Justice Rose demanded to know how di Stefano of Studio Legale Internazionale in Italy was related to instructing solicitors Paul Martin & Co and why his signature appeared on appeal documentation.

"Usually, documents of this kind emanate either from a member of the Bar of England and Wales or a solicitor with higher rights of audience," the judge said. "Mr di Stefano doesn't appear to be in either of those categories. How does it come about that he submits advice to this court?"

Di Stefano said that a European directive enabled him as an Italian-qualified lawyer to enjoy the same rights of audience as English lawyers and that Paul Martin & Co solicitors were an affiliate of his Italian outfit. There is indeed a registered law firm called Studio Legale Internazionale which has offices in Rome and London. However, it denies any association with Mr di Stefano.

During the same hearing, counsel acting for the prison service revealed that under the name John di Stefano he had 19 previous convictions in Britain, one in Ireland and others in Italy. In March 1986 an Old Bailey judge jailed him for five years for taking part in a £25m fraud, and described di Stefano as a "swindler without scruple or conscience".

When pressed by the *Guardian* to prove his legal qualifications, he was unable to produce any evidence for them. A further claim – that his conviction for fraud in 1986 had been overturned on appeal – was equally groundless. A Law Society spokesman said that its investigation had uncovered no evidence that he was a qualified "avvocato".

Others to have benefited from his legal advice include M25 road rage murderer Kenneth Noye, property tycoon Nicholas van Hoogstraten, Jeremy Bamber (who killed five members of his own family in 1985) and the late Dr Harold Shipman. Or at least that was what di Stefano claimed shortly after Shipman's death: "I can confirm that we advised Harold Shipman about a number of issues, including a possible appeal against his conviction and the Shipman public inquiry. We are also advising members of his family about issues arising from his death." This was immediately refuted by Michael Schwarz of Bindman & Partners: "Neither I nor members of Harold Shipman's family, on whose behalf I act, are aware that [he] instructed them [Paul Martin & Co and/or Studio Legale Internazionale]."

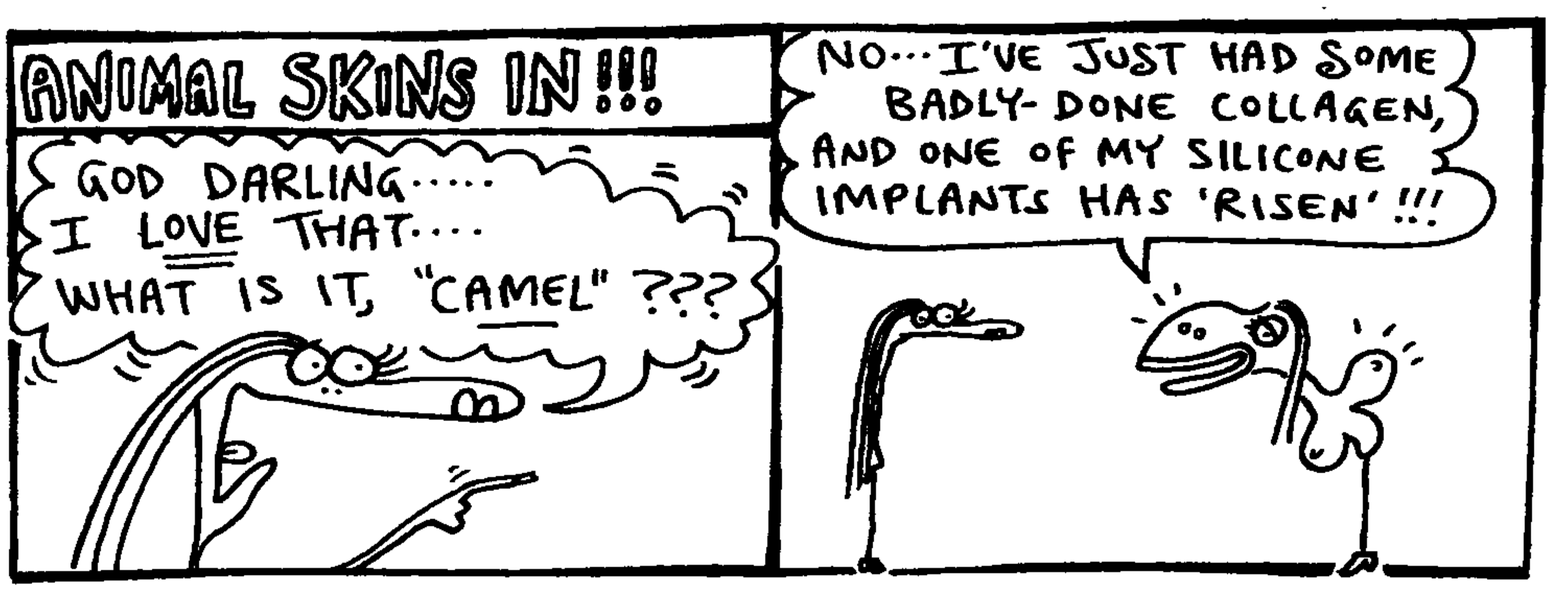
It is not just in the UK that di Stefano likes to keep dangerous company. In March last year, he spoke movingly to the BBC about his late friend, Zeljko Raznatovic, more famously known as the Serbian ganglord Arkan. "He loved me very much as a human being. And I liked him as a person. He had good morals. He was a good person. And I'm not ashamed of saying it." Another whom di Stefano counted among his friends in the region was Slobodan Milosevic.

Bizarrely, he also claims to have met Osama bin Laden in Baghdad in 1998. "He had a handshake like a woman. He had a soft voice. He spoke like a priest… It was well before the bombings there," he recalled. "And, had I known what I know now, I should have, as Arkan said, probably killed him."

According to di Stefano, his client Jonathan King has been forced to install CCTV cameras at his London home to stop "anyone making up more stories". Who on earth could he have in mind?

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


ANIMAL SKINS IN!!!
GOD DARLING····· I LOVE THAT···· WHAT IS IT, "CAMEL" ???
NO···I'VE JUST HAD SOME BADLY-DONE COLLAGEN, AND ONE OF MY SILICONE IMPLANTS HAS 'RISEN'!!!

DOING THE ROUNDS

"THE only purpose in using the private sector is if there are blockages in the system, and we need to go outside in order to get work done that can't be done in the NHS... It would obviously be absurd if you have public sector facilities standing idle while going out to the private sector."

So said Tony Blair on 30 March, trotting out the familiar "new" Labour justification for farming out diagnosis and treatment of NHS patients to the private sector.

But Blair is being disingenuous. Had the money that has been ploughed into the private sector been invested in the NHS, a better and more sustainable service could have been developed. As consultant radiologist Tom Goodfellow put it: "Can you understand our frustration that the government chose to enter into a £90m contract with Alliance Medical to provide MRI scans while up and down the country NHS scanners are frequently significantly underused because of lack of resources to run them?"

This point was also made by Kevan Jones, Labour MP for North Durham, claiming that patients at the University Hospital of North Durham were having to travel to Middlesborough for Alliance scans when the trust's scanner was "considerably under-employed." As are the Alliance scanners, according to a consultant at the Royal Liverpool University Trust. "Several patients were rung by Alliance and invited to go to Taunton for MRI scans. One unfortunate, who is not a native English speaker, took a National Express coach, arrived for his scan but was not expected and was sent away, unscanned.

"They did not even try to trace the form, which we would have happily faxed to them, so at least he could have had the scan. He lost two days of pay and the coach fare. We felt so sorry for him that we have refunded his expenses and arranged his scan in house. The worst of this is that the Alliance scanner was at our hospital the very next week, and due to gross administrative incompetence, half the slots were empty in Liverpool."

Since M.D. exposed the problems of delays and misreporting of scans by Alliance last year (*Eye* 1122), the Royal College of Radiologists (RCR) has advised radiology departments to check all scans carried out by Alliance. The department of health has also appointed Professor Adrian Dixon from the RCR to act as "clinical guardian" to the contract to address "alleged concerns over quality." But doctors at Lewisham University hospital have stopped referring to Alliance because of inaccurate reporting. As one told *Hospital Doctor*: "It was a mess. We had reports of cancers when they weren't cancers."

Health secretary John "Oh fuck, not health" Reid claims all this bleating is just a "culture of resistance" to private sector provision. But the block contracts and guaranteed income promised to the private sector has caused public sector facilities to stand idle. Hence orthopaedic beds at Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust were closed as patients were forced to go to a private centre in Salisbury. And in Oxfordshire, trust managers resigned when Whitehall put pressure on them to sign up to a private-sector cataract service they felt they didn't need (*Eyes passim*).

Labour's slavish conversion to the private sector is less to do with clearing blockages and more to do with introducing unfair competition at huge expense (and unproven quality) to shake up and destabilise the NHS. Blair believes that if patients needing diagnosis and treatment are seen more quickly, the strategy is justified at any cost. While the NHS has to carry the can for staff training, emergencies and chronic illness, it can never compete with private cherry pickers. If it continues, many hospitals will be stripped down and forced to merge or close. This may not always be a bad thing, but Blair and Reid should at least be honest about where their policy is heading.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

WE NO LONGER JUST BRUTALLY TELL PATIENTS THEY HAVE A TERMINAL CONDITION...
WARD 3
THESE DAYS, WE'RE MUCH MORE SENSITIVE AND SUBTLE
NO NEED TO BOTHER WITH THE LUNCH MENU TODAY, DEAR...

SIGNAL FAILURES

U-turn before u know it

THE government policy that rail franchises should only go to companies with a record of good performance has been dropped.

Now that Stagecoach has made the shortlists for two big franchises, Greater Western (including Wessex Trains) and Thameslink (including Great Northern), it's clear Labour has reverted to not even pretending to give a toss about passengers.

Transport secretary Alistair Darling opened competitions for these franchises less than four months ago, saying: "Today marks an important next step: implementing the white paper goal of making sure that past performance is taken into account when letting new rail franchises to ensure that only those operators with a demonstrable track record of customer delivery and financial management are eligible for the next phase."

If "customer delivery" means delivering customers to their destinations on time, Stagecoach fails to make the grade. Its South West Trains franchise started with chaos after too many drivers were ditched to save cash. And for the last few years SWT, whose hub is at Waterloo, has been at or near the bottom of the south-east's punctuality league, usually notching up the biggest fines for bad service. Latest statistics, for the third quarter of 2004-5, show 77 percent of SWT's "all day" trains were on time, the worst record in the south-east. For peak trains, only Great Western Link was worse than SWT's 72 percent.

Stagecoach has certainly provided good "financial management" for shareholders, who pocketed a £250m windfall last year (*Eye* 1110), but not for passengers or taxpayers. SWT always had more generous subsidy than any other franchise, but other operators gave better service. Then SWT's subsidy increased nearly 400 percent while plans for longer trains to ease overcrowding were dropped as unaffordable. In January SWT again upped uncapped fares ahead of inflation.

Stagecoach owns half of Virgin Rail, whose franchises traditionally occupy the bottom of the intercity league table. The latest stats show Virgin West Coast at 66.4 percent punctuality and Virgin Cross Country at 73.1 – worse even than First Great Western's pisspoor 75.7 and GNER's miserable 75.8. That's despite cuts to other services to try to make Virgin work (*Eyes passim*). "Financial management" has been so dire that Virgin's promised premium payments to the state have been replaced by continuous bailouts – £570m subsidy in 2003-04 alone.

THE latest report criticising the London Underground public private partnership, this time from parliament's public accounts committee (PAC), reveals what a bonanza the deal was for the bankers.

As with all privately financed projects, the borrowings taken on by the private sector consortia that now own and run the tube infrastucture, Metronet and Tubelines, are much more expensive than standard government borrowing. In turn the companies are charging Transport for London (TfL) around £450m more for financing the PPP than if it had borrowed the money itself.

The standard justification for more expensive borrowing in privately financed projects is that the banks take the risk of not getting their money back from the private sector if the deal fails, unlike lenders to the government who will always be repaid. On the tube PPP, however, the PAC found the government guaranteed that the lenders "would receive 95% of their investment back in the event of termination of the PPP". So not that risky, then.

The report also revealed that the PPP cost £1bn to set up, most of the cash going to consultants and lawyers. Among the chief beneficiaries was PricewaterhouseCoopers, who just happened to have produced the "independent" report on funding the underground that the government commissioned in 1999, which made the incredible assumption that privately financed procurement was 20 percent more efficient than traditional methods.

Unsurprisingly the firm recommended a PPP contract rather than the public borrowing that the PAC shows would have been so much cheaper.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
Hello...I need to travel on the next Peak service to Manchester...
...CAN YOU LEND ME THE MONEY FOR THE TICKET?
INSTANT CASH LOANS
Srizelda

■ROTTEN BOROUGHS■

DAME GELD

THE SAGA of Dame Shirley Porter's gerrymandering of Westminster council in the 1980s, her subsequent disqualification from holding public office and the fight to get her to cough-up the £42m surcharge imposed on her by the courts, grows more bizarre by the week.

Take the tribulations of Westminster Labour councillor Paul Dimoldenberg, for example, who for years fought to ensure that Porter was brought to book. In August 2003 Dimoldenberg was reported to the local government watchdog, the Standards Board for England (SBE), by Peter Rogers, Westminster council's chief executive, for having commented on the BBC *Today* programme that Westminster council had been tardy in its attempts to trace Porter's hidden wealth – a wicked allegation (though perfectly true) that had "brought the council into disrepute".

What seemed to upset Westminster most was that Dimoldenberg had leaked council documents that proved his point. Following an 18-month investigation, the SBE ruled that Dimoldenberg had a case to answer and referred the matter to its adjudication panel, which has the power to ban councillors from holding public office for up to five years. At a preliminary hearing in February, Dimoldenberg won the right to mount a public interest defence for his actions, the first time this has happened in an SBE case.

However, when Dimoldenberg asked to be allowed to show his legal advisers council documents which would help him clear his name, he was told he couldn't as a confidentiality deal had been struck between Westminster and Dame Shirley. So, at the full hearing next month, Dimoldenberg will be severely hindered answering the charges against him because he is being denied access to the very evidence that would prove his case.

Meanwhile, Stephenson Harwood (SH), the solicitors' firm employed by Westminster to trace Lady Tesco's hidden fortune, has won the "dispute resolution team of the year award" from *Legal Business* magazine. SH's John Fordham boasts that "the award is in recognition of my team's hard work in tracking down Dame Shirley Porter's millions... achieving a very satisfactory settlement for Westminster city council".

The award was however for "Dispute Resolution", rather than, say, "Uncovering-all-the-hidden-assets-of-someone-the-UK-courts-had found-to-be-corrupt". Some may wonder exactly how satisfactory it was to recover a mere £12.3m – the final settlement figure – when Porter owed some £42m and had known assets of £70m-plus. "Satisfactory" does of course describe the £1.75m Stephenson Harwood has pocketed in legal fees on the Porter case so far.

"Isn't it nice to see children out getting some exercise?"

CLUELESS CLUNESS

FISH FARM filth is poised to engulf Shetland Island Council (SIC), condemned earlier this month by the national audit office (NAO) for financial incompetence.

Private Eye has seen a document which demonstrates that council leader Sandy Cluness and chief executive Morgan Goodlad lied about their part in securing millions of pounds of public money to assist a company managed by the chief executive's brother, Dr Alistair Goodlad.

Alistair was managing director of fish farm operator SSG Seafoods (SSG) which collapsed in December 2003 with debts of £13.5m (*Eyes passim*), £7m having been invested in SSG by the council's Shetland Development Trust (SDT), Shetland Leasing & Property Ltd (SLAP) and by Shetland Aquaculture Trust.

Chief exec Morgan has always said he had nothing to do with pumping council money into his brother's firm. "Categorically I can tell you that I was not involved in any form of decision-making process with SDT in relationship to SSG, nor could I," he told the *Shetland Times* in May last year. In a letter to a Shetland resident in March this year Cllr Cluness said: "At none of the meetings which had any bearing on SSG do I detect involvement of the chief executive in the reports or in the discussion."

Cluness and Goodlad seem to have suffered a major memory lapse. The *Eye* has a copy of an email from the chief executive's office dated 21 March 2002, "Subject: RE: SSG Seafoods Ltd/Dury Salmon Ltd'". (Dury Salmon being a financially-challenged fish farm business that the council had invested in and which SSG wanted to buy.)

The email's recipient was Wendy Goudie of the Shetland Development Trust. It was copied to Cllr Cluness. It asked Goudie to *"prepare a short report for SDT incorporating £1m investment opportunity structured as £500,000 representing 49.5% equity... Good luck and thanks for all the hard work* – Morgan".

The "hard work" Morgan referred to appears to have followed a meeting he and others attended on 6 February 2002 to discuss support for SSG's bid to buy Dury Salmon.

Advice was also taken from Rodger Murray, of Edinburgh solicitors Brodies. Ms Goudie emailed Morgan Goodlad: "His [Murray's] suggestions were based on the requirement for the Trust to achieve a commercial return, whilst bearing in mind the sensitivity of the business [SSG] to further debt burden."

Ms Goudie also told Cluness and Goodlad: "SSG Seafoods wishes to point out that the company... cannot proceed with the takeover of Dury without securing equity funds of this level [49.5%]. SSG Seafoods has asked that in considering the request, the Trust bear in mind the future earning potential and prospects of the company."

Three years on, with £7m of taxpayers' money down the drain, Sandy Cluness and Morgan Goodlad still deny having been involved.

CIRENCESTER'S new leisure centre is now seven weeks behind schedule, according to a new report.

Once the centre is complete, the centre will be demolished and new financial services headquarters built there.

Wilts & Glos. Standard

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

IT'S almost a year since *Eye* 1103 reported that Wrexham council was considering selling off three playing fields to recoup the £10m overspend on its botched schools reorganisation.

Two school fields and the large public Nine Acre Park were all under threat. A huge fuss kicked up by local campaigners appeared to have put paid to those plans, but last month new plans were submitted for new housing on yet another playing field the council wants to flog – the Barracks Field.

The development would swallow up two and a half acres of park; but councillors say the development will allow sports facilities, including a skate park, to be built on what's left – hardly a consolation for those without wheels.

Meanwhile villagers in nearby Rhosllannerchrugog are campaigning to save their beloved Ponciau Banks Park, on which Wrexham council wants to build a new school. And when councillors decided where to build Wrexham's new £800,000 youth centre earlier this year, where did they choose? The Acton Playing Field, the last remaining bit of green space in that part of town!

School fields belonging to both Barker's Lane and Watts Dyke primary schools in Wrexham had already vanished under luxury housing developments, even before the overspend disaster. Very soon Wrexham will have no green space left at all.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

QUIN'S BEEN ORDERED NOT TO USE HIS HANDS; THE DOCTOR SAID IT WAS THE WORST CASE OF RSI HE'S EVER SEEN
I TOLD YOU THOSE ALL NIGHT SESSIONS AT THE KEYBOARD WOULD BE BAD FOR YOU... HAS YOUR WORK BEEN AFFECTED?
NEVER MIND WORK...: I'VE BEEN WARNED I MAY NEVER KNIT AGAIN!

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

SHOULD a primary school trust the fire risk assessment it receives from consultants when the assessment is accompanied by a quote for more than £1,000 worth of work needed *to fix the* alleged problems?

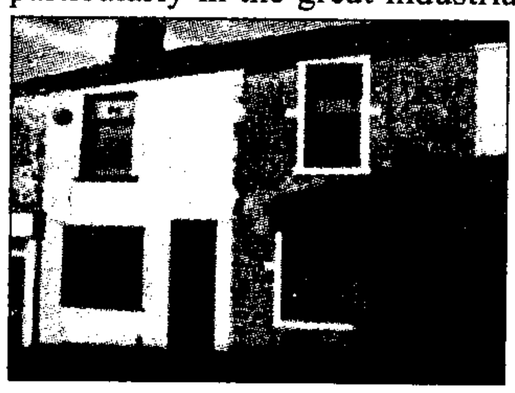
Bexley council's recommended private consultant, Workplace Fire and Safety Ltd, based in Bexleyheath, will do the assessment itself for £375. But one primary school was surprised to find that the report listing the remedial work needed (mainly moving fire extinguishers and signs) included the firm's pricing for doing the jobs. The school had passed previous inspections by the fire service without a hitch.

Bexley council told the *Eye* it doesn't mind the contractor offering a quote along with the assessment. But the firm can hardly be an impartial assessor when it stands to gain from putting right all the things it has found amiss. Shome conflict of interest, shurely?

NOOKS and CORNERS

PUBLICATION of *Damned Beautiful, a catalogue of Buildings at Risk for 2005,* marks the 30th anniversary of SAVE Britain's Heritage. It begins with an effective demolition of the government's insane "Pathfinder" or Housing Market Renewal Initiative, which requires the demolition of between 75,000 and 400,000 houses, many or most of them perfectly sound, at a cost of £500m (*Eye* 1126).

"The greatest threat to our heritage at the moment is not to Grade I listed country houses, but to the 'petit patrimoine', the pre-1919 building stock that makes up much of our towns and cities, particularly in the great industrial towns of England... The housing market has altered radically since the inception of the Pathfinder policy and so the evidence base on which the policy was built has been eroded yet the policy ploughs on regardless in spite of the fact that the repair of these buildings has in many Pathfinder areas become economically viable."



Going, going... gone?

The SAVE report cites the case of Darwen, a mill town in Lancashire, where the local authority wants to demolish 151 terrace houses of c.1850 near the town centre, even though evidence suggests they are structurally sound. The social and environmental costs of such old-fashioned "slum clearance" are huge, but no doubt the local community – and those owner-occupiers who will lose their homes against their will – will be perfectly content to remember these terraces as a virtual moving image on a computer screen, courtesy of the DCMS.

'Piloti'

LONDON Mayor Ken Livingstone's love of skyscrapers and those who build them is matched only by his hatred of London's borough councils, which he has promised to "smash" if they defy him.

So when Lambeth council dared to object to the 50-storey block proposed for a site in Vauxhall by Ken's favourite developer, St George, he went ballistic. "If people decide to block progress in this city, then we will fight them, and if they lose they will bear the full cost and we will extract every penny of the cost," he raged.

The council stuck to its guns, however, pointing out that, in terms of habitable rooms, the Vauxhall Tower scheme contained only 27 percent "affordable" housing, well short of the mayor's own target of 50 percent. The developer's trick was to set off large (4-5 bedroom) private flats in the tower against small (studio and one-bed) "affordable" units in a separate block.

St George appealed against the council's refusal, and the inquiry was heard last year. Although he was no more than a witness at the inquiry, Ken managed to spend more than £96,000 of London taxpayers' money in support of his wealthy friends. Last week John Prescott issued his decision. The tower could go ahead – but only if St George increases the number and size of the affordable homes, the better "to meet local housing needs".

This leaves Ken needing to explain why he made fearsome threats and spent almost £100,000 in an effort to get fewer affordable homes than will now be the case.

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE MOST telling sign of desperation and disarray in the classical CD industry is the way so many artists are opting out of the system.

Tired of being marginalized by big companies where classical "product" is only a small and insignificantly profitable part of the business, they are severing their relationships with DG, Sony, EMI, whoever, and going it alone with their own homespun CD labels. There was a time when this sort of thing was called vanity publishing.

Now it's called survival.

Just about all the British orchestras are doing it: first the RLPO; then the Halle; and now the London Philharmonic.

Even the mighty LSO has its own label these days, causing much ill-feeling in the process because it undercuts the pricing of the big, established CD companies. "They're selling themselves cheap," a former boss at EMI complains. "They'll lose respect and come back with their tail between their legs."

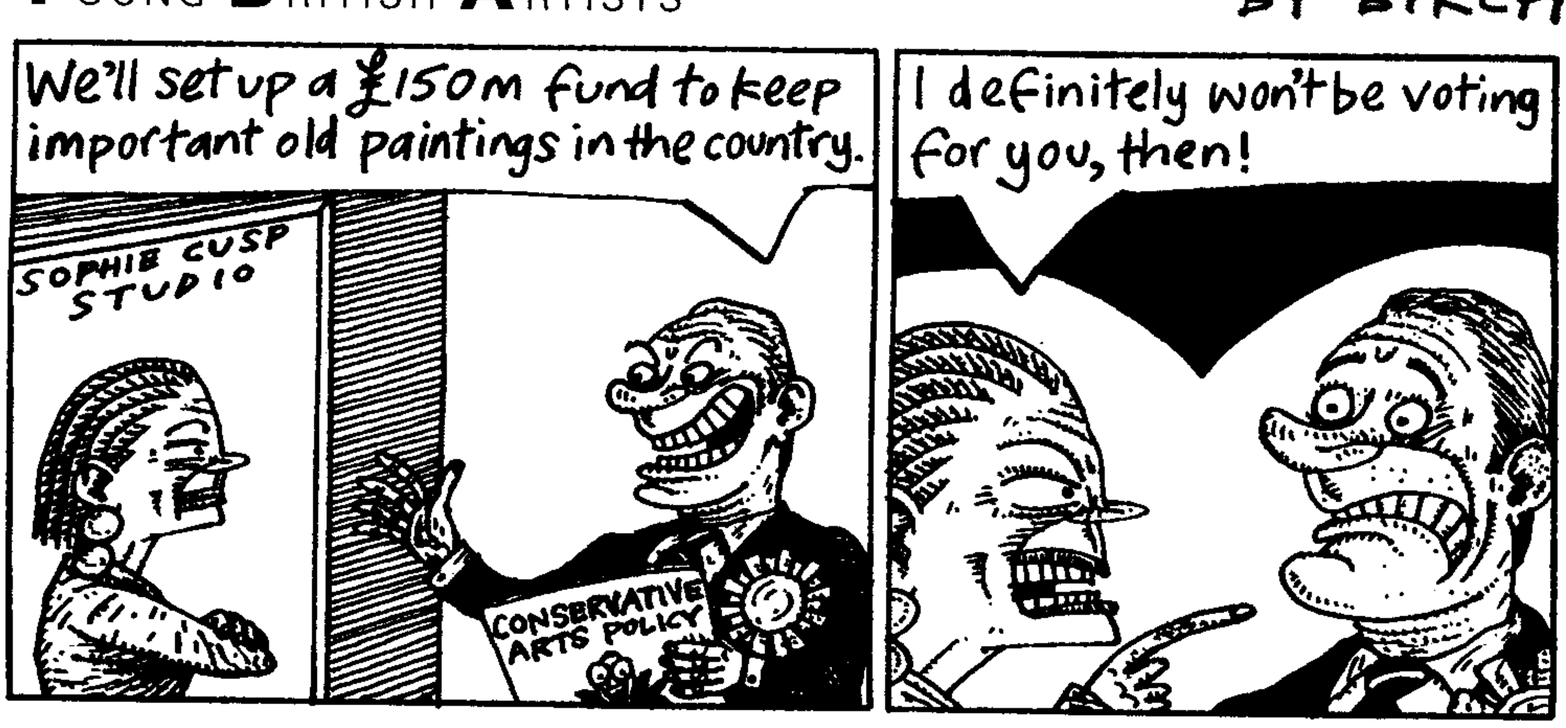
In fact so far the LSO own-label isn't doing badly. It picks up awards and, more importantly, it sells. But when an industry becomes so seriously fragmented, it can only lose its muscle or its mind. The future looks chaotic and regressive, with the once-impressive, international-glamour world of CDs withering back to cottage-industry status. And it's not exactly great for the image of quality ensembles like the LSO and LPO to be seen grubbing around with other contenders in the own-label market for whom it really *is* vanity publishing.

Recently the dreaded Michael Nyman launched his own label, MN records, to feature nothing but his own scores (oh joy unbounded!) in what is effectively a two-fingered gesture to the big labels that, in his words, "give you your one set release a year, two weeks of promotion, then leave you a catalogue item". Nyman says he's "thrilled" with the idea of his own label. So at least someone's happy.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH


We'll set up a £150m fund to keep important old paintings in the country.
SOPHIE CUSP STUDIO
CONSERVATIVE ARTS POLICY
I definitely won't be voting for you, then!

Down on the Farm

IF THE election were to be decided by the government's record on farming, Labour would be lucky to receive a single vote. Not for nothing has Defra, set up in 2001 after the foot-and-mouth disaster, become known as the Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs.

Since 1997 a sorry crew of farming ministers, from Jack "T Bone" Cunningham and Nick Brown to Rosa Klebb (aka Mrs Beckett), from Elliott Morley and Lord Whitty to "Baby Ben" Bradshaw, have displayed a contempt for Britain's farming community without political precedent.

The 2001 election, of course, coincided with the end of the FMD crisis, perhaps the greatest act of maladministration by any government in history, costing the UK economy at least £8bn. As any proper public inquiry would have found – which is why the Beloved Leader did not allow one, but instead set up three "pseudo-inquiries" – the "pre-emptive cull" of more than eight million healthy animals was ordered by ministers in clear breach of the criminal law. This they implicitly admitted when, in 2002, they shamefacedly sneaked in their new animal health act, to give them all the powers to kill any animal they wish which they had falsely pretended to possess in 2001.

Then there was the refusal of the European Commission to hand over most of the £900m claimed by the UK, on the grounds that Defra had ludicrously overspent on the crisis. This led in turn to Defra ministers such as Elliott Morley taking it out on the contractors who had fallen over backwards to help in 2001, by refusing to pay £100m for work Defra had pleaded with them to carry out, and which was all fully accounted for.

But the FMD debacle was only the most glaring example of how Labour's ministers have routinely bullied, blustered and abused their powers in tyrannising the farming industry, usually followed by lying to justify their blunders.

There has, for instance, been the astonishing and continuing shambles of the "fallen stock" scheme, Defra's pitifully inept effort to enact a diktat from Brussels that no dead animal can any longer be buried on the farm. For nearly two years after making this a criminal offence, Defra had to continue to allow farmers to break this absurd law because it had not made any proper arrangements for the fallen stock to be picked up. This is why even today the farmyards of Wales are littered with rotting, stinking carcases which should long since have been given a decent burial, or left out for natural disposal by foxes and birds.

Then there has been the fiasco over bovine TB. "Baby Ben's" refusal to listen to the advice of almost every vet in the land that he should cull sick badgers is resulting in an epidemic of TB in cattle which even Defra admits will end up within 10 years costing taxpayers £2bn.

The list of Defra's blunders goes on, from the mass-closure of abattoirs to its ludicrous mishandling of the EU's new single farm payment scheme, forcing farmers to grub up their cider orchards and robbing dairy farmers of £600m in compensation specifically allocated to them by Brussels. But fortunately for Labour, it has done so well in putting farmers out of business (an estimated 50,000, or more than a third, since 2000 alone) that there are no longer enough of them left to sway the vote in any constituency in the land.

'Muckspreader'

Letters

Private Eye

Lookalikes

Wallace

HRH

Sir,

While reading the coverage of his opinion of BBC royal correspondent Nicholas Witchell, I couldn't help but notice the startling similarity between the heir to the throne, HRH Prince Charles, and Aardman Animations' Wallace, of Wallace and Gromit fame.

Could these bloody people be related?

JAMES THRESHER,

London SW15.

That thinking feeling

Sir,

I am struck by the similarity between Michael Howard's slogan in the 2005 British general election "Are you thinking what we're thinking?" and Jean Marie Le Pen's slogan in the 1988 French presidential election "Notre programme est-ce que vous pensez" ("Our programme is what you're thinking").

I wonder if they are by any chance related?

Yours,
WILL HOLLOWAY,

London N22.

A stake holder writes...

Sir,

With Tony Blair's letter appearing on the front page of a tabloid this morning, one wonders if the Tory leader will be following suit.

A source at Conservative Central Office denies this, saying "Mr Howard won't be appearing in the mirror".

Yours with apologies if I'm the 400th person to make this joke.

ALEX MUSSON,

Via email.

We are amused

Sir,

Since you have developed a taste for historical documents (Bradford School meals – incidentally they were the first committee to feed those who would otherwise have starved), perhaps a certain member of a religious minority group would enjoy the following from Queen Victoria's journal:

"I too well know its truth from experience, that whenever poor Gipsies [sic] are encamped anywhere and crimes and robberies &c occur, it is invariably laid to their account, which is shocking: and if they are always looked on as vagabonds, how can they become good people?" (Journal, 29 December 1836.)

Thanks for the fortnightly delight.

Yours sincerely,
JOHN GARDNER,

Huddersfield.

Eye scoop

Sir,

From online Media Guardian: "Jason Deans, broadcasting editor, Wednesday April 6 2005.

BBC presenter John Humphrys stands to make £270,000 from YouGov, the polling firm chaired by election pundit Peter Kellner, when it floats next month"

Now why can't you get scoops like that? Erm, oops, sorry.

IAN McROBERT,

Via email.

(It was also in Times Business, 6 April, Ed.)

Guilty secrets

Sir,

In order to maintain essential balance to your excellent series on Miscarriages of Justice, perhaps you should do a series on how really evil people managed to escape justice through the machinations of their lawyers. You could even use the same title for the articles.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN CURRY,

Bristol.

Abandon ship

Sir,

I noted in your last issue you commented on the accuracy of a UKTV history programme on battleships. I would like to add that the programme was even less accurate than you mention. At no point in the history of the Tirpitz did it ever engage in combat with the USS Iowa, and Tirpitz itself only fired her guns once in anger during a costal bombardment. Iowa was deployed as a counter to Tirpitz for around six months, but the two ships did not come into contact during this period.

Therefore not only did the makers of the programme fail to make mention of the British efforts that resulted in her being sunk, they misled their viewers outright with the impression that the two ships had engaged in combat of a sort which Iowa came off the better. It's a shame that such programme makers cannot simply stick to the facts really and instead mirror Hollywood's ability to change history. Being a documentary, they cannot even claim artistic licence!

Regards,
NEIL HOLMES,

Via email.

Lookalikes

Cherie

Duchess

Sir,

Did anybody else notice the resemblance between Cherie Blair, at the Vespers service for the Pope, and Goya's famous portrait of the Duchess of Alba?

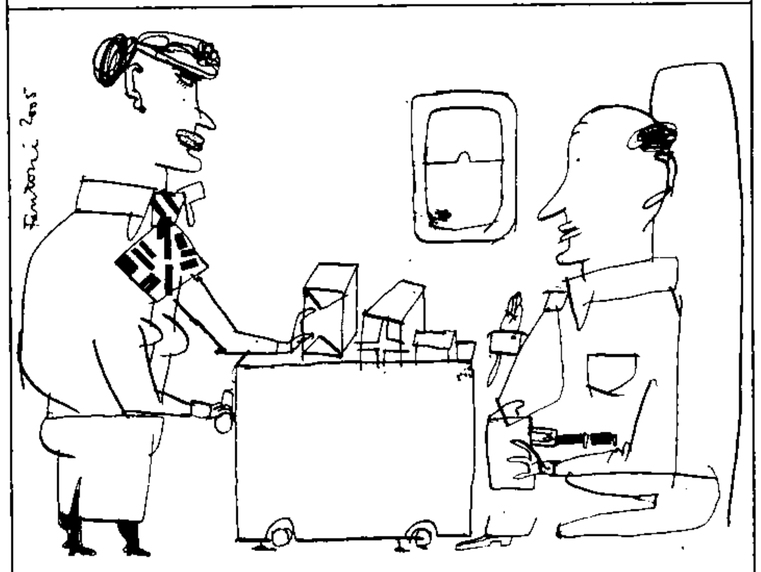
RICHARD WOODWARD,

London N20.

"It's lamb", the dinner lady whispered to an intermediary, since she had been told not to talk to the press by her catering company, Initial Rentokil.

Grauniad

Scenes You Seldom See



"Ah! The Duty Free trolley. I'll have a designer leather belt... some aftershave... a digital camera... the pen set... your desk-standing model of a Boeing 737"

Oldie but goodie

Sir,

I was moved almost to emotion to discover the generous establishment of the Gnome Home for Elderly Cartoons. There can be no other reason for the inclusion of Ian Baker's contribution (Eye 1129, p5): "You're in denial". "No, I'm not."

May I suggest next: Psychiatrist among bulrushes on the Egyptian banks, patient wrestling with crocodiles: "You're in denial." "Yes, I am."

It goes to show that the old ones really are, um... old. Is the home a registered charity? Will contributions be deductable?

Yours,
PETE WARD,

London NW1.

Borders skirmish

Sir,

Your mention of my charming ex-wife, Laura Marney, in Eye 1128, caused me to have a quick riffle through her book in Borders.

I suspect that maidenly modesty would not permit her to defend her entry in Willie Maley's 100 best Scottish writers, so might I be permitted to make the claim on her behalf. She surely deserves her place on the basis that she has breathed new life into the shortbread tin/ Glasgow kitsch school of writing, as exemplified by Molly Weir in "Shoes were for Sunday", through the judicious use of swearing, masturbation and political correctness. Mind you, it does make one wonder why Molly herself never made the list, along with the scriptwriter from Brigadoon.

Pip pip,
JOHN-PAUL MARNEY,

London E16.

PS: Might I be permitted to wish a very happy 80th birthday to a genuinely talented Scottish writer, George McDonald Fraser.

Ball bearings

Sir,

*Re: Premiersh*ts cartoon, Eye 1129. It is a shame that you didn't allow your cartoonist more space to do a "before and after" comparison.*

Without it we missed out on seeing the training regime for such great rugby skills as eye gouging, ear biting, stamping on opponents' heads, concealed punching and winning of tournaments by deliberate illegal handling of the ball in the last seconds of the match and where naked outward-bound-type activities fit in I really don't know.

STEPHEN GREEN,

Via email.

Science friction

Sir,

Shock horror: Private Eye acknowledges existence of science fiction! Shame you had to make something up in order to be suitably scathing about it. Hardons, indeed. Presumably you refer to the Autons, who were the main villain (not "in the background") in two stories (not one) featuring Jon Pertwee (not William Hartnell) back in the 70s (not the 60s). Other than that, your reputation for accuracy remains unaltered.

Doubtless you will receive many more letters from various articles of outerwear pointing this out.

Doctor Who is 943 (or thereabouts).

Yours,
ZANDER NYROND,
Westbury, Wilts.

Photo opportunity

Sir,

I share your positive appraisal of the new series of Doctor Who (Eye 1129). However, in this day and age, one must be at least a little concerned at the message being sent out when the "hero" is a 900-year-old white male of alien origin who lures a beautiful but naïve young girl into his time-travelling adventures.

Out of interest, do you have any pictures in your archives of similarly aged and otherworldly white males with a beautiful but inappropriately young female companion?

Regards,
NEIL O'CONNOR,
Sheffield.

Not so dumb

Sir,

Re Dumb South Africa (Eye 1129). It's not particularly dumb to answer "Haile Selassie" when asked the name of the only African to win the men's Olympic 100 metres. It is the wrong answer but given that Haile Gebre Selassie is one of the greatest runners of all time – albeit a distance runner not a sprinter – it's hardly a major howler.

TIM POWELL,
Bath.

Lookalikes

Frog

King

Sir,

On his recent release from prison, I was shocked to notice a disturbing resemblance between Jonathan King and Kermit the Frog. To avoid any risk of confusion among your younger readers, might I urge your esteemed organ to take this opportunity to highlight the difference between the child-friendly frog and the revolting old toad?

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD CHORLEY,
Via email.

AROUND THE UK NOW

ENGLAND
Sex disease clinics 'cannot cope'

NORTHERN IRELAND
Northern Ireland mourns the Pope

SCOTLAND
Scotland's tribute to late Pope

WALES
Wales mourning death of the Pope

BBC Website, 3 April 2005

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The problem is that the illnesses began to pile up, like dominoes falling."
Sky News (on the Pope)
(Rachel Dussek)

"Keith Gillespie... just lacks a bit of inconsistency."
GRAEME LE SAUX, BBC1
(Owen Bellamy)

"I know what my strengths are, and I know what my not strengths are."
ADRIAN BOOTHROYD, BBC News 24
(Craig Cunningham)

"Poland have absolutely literally torn Azerbaijan to pieces."
PATRICK KINGHORN, Talksport
(Julian Thake)

"The horse sadly died this morning, so it looks like he won't be running in the Gold Cup."
CHARLIE McCANN, Talksport
(N.D. Ogilvie)

SOLUTIONS

"Loving Links: Quality mid-life dating solutions" – *dating agency*

"String tying solutions and threads" – *packaging*

"Human powered solutions" – *bicycles*

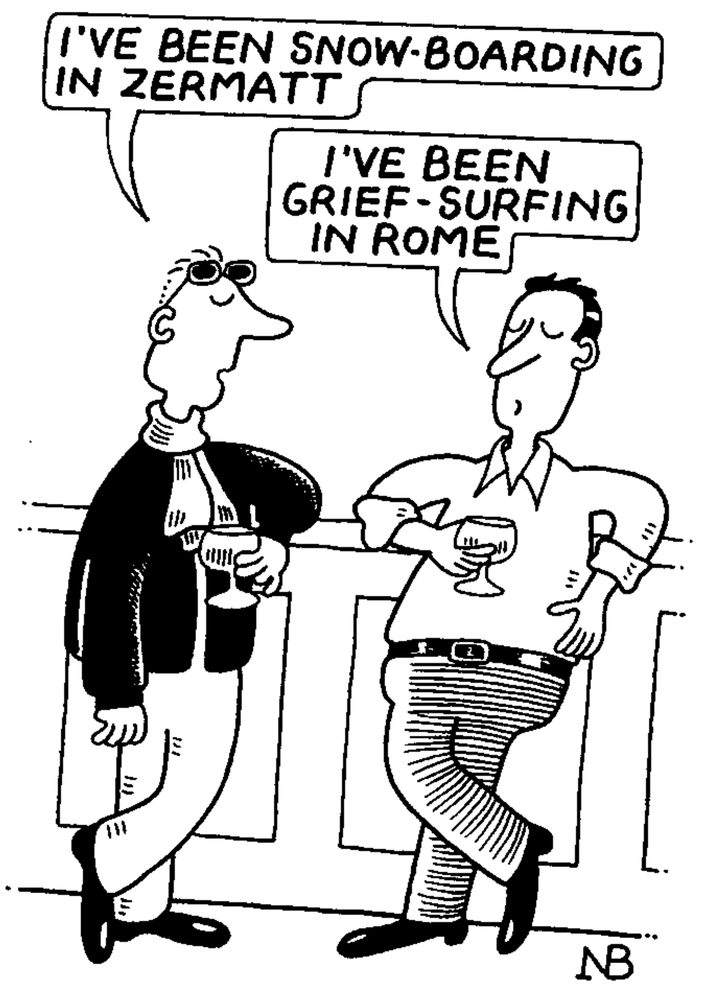
"Expense claim solutions" – *taxi receipt*

"Chocolate solutions" – *Dessert caterers*

"Exterior design solutions" – *tool sheds*

"Grinding solutions" – *tool manufacturers*

All submitted by readers



Volume sales

Sir,

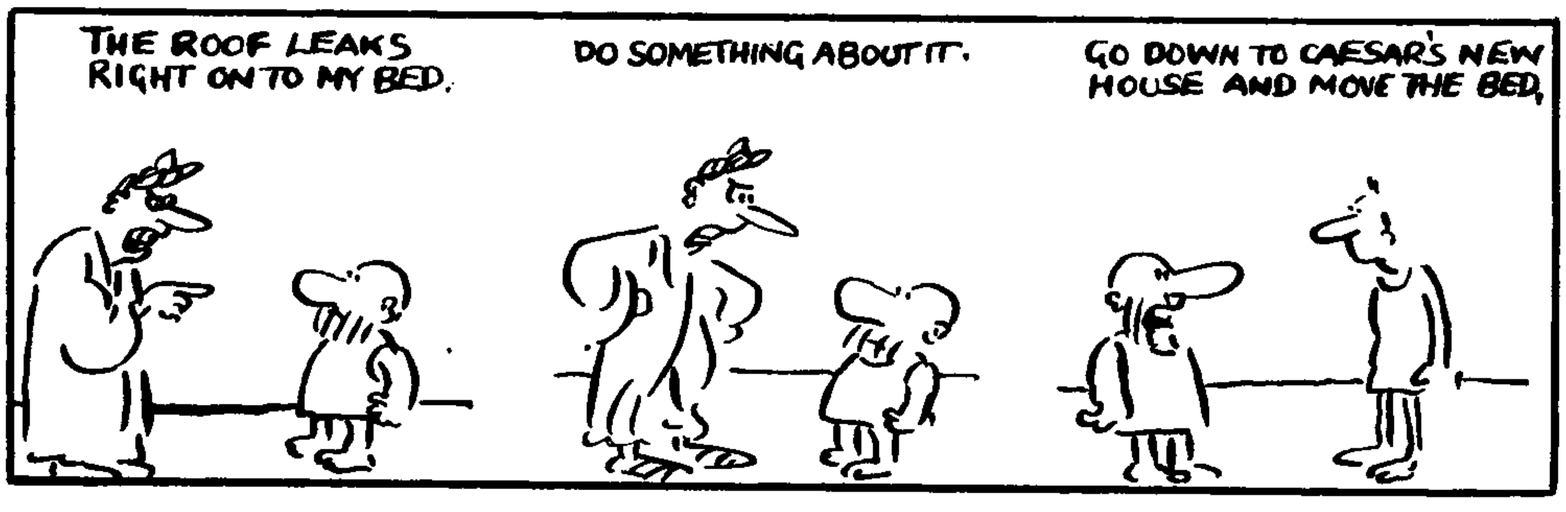
Re: Brighton reference collections, us book-dealing aficionados of Quintos in Charing Cross Road have certainly been delighted to acquire numerous discarded items from this source, eg Keller's 1878 2 vol. "Lake Dwellings", 5 vols "Extracts from the Records of the City of Edinburgh" 1869-1892 (very nice condition), and Elliot's 3 vol. primatology classic "Review of the Primates" (1913), as well as various titles in the massive "Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages" series – so hard luck on any medieval historians at University of Sussex (mind you Winchester public library appears to have disposed of this as well). They may be in trouble, however: a label in the front of Grosseteste's "Epistolae" states: "This Volume is presented by the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury to Brighton Public Library, January 1890, and will, in the event of the Library being broken up, be returned to the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Westminster."

I could go on about the New College Oxford and Royal College of Surgeons' collections as well. The consolation is that these will end up in the hands of people who genuinely care rather than philistine institutions only interested in installing IT technology with a life-span of five years in their place.

Cheers!
PROF. GRAHAM RICHARDS,
British Psychological Society, London WC1.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



X marks despot

Letter from **Kyrgyzstan**

from Our Own Correspondent

WHEN the "tulip revolution" flowered in Kyrgyzstan last month, the only foreign office support for the scores of British citizens who live there was British café owner Mike Atsoparthis. He holds the untrained post of honorary consul in the country.

While president Askar Akayev fled on 24 March after protesters stormed his office and the opposition seized power, there was no official British diplomat in the capital, Bishkek, or anywhere else in the country, to monitor what was going on or advise Britons and Commonwealth citizens while the city's streets were full of riot police.

And why is there no British embassy in Kyrgyzstan? MPs on the foreign affairs committee have asked the same question of foreign office mandarin Sir Michael Jay over and over again in the past few years. They have been recommending that an embassy be opened in Bishkek to help improve business links, send a message of support for democratic reform and allow the British Council to reopen its office there.

Each time the foreign office has agreed that it would be nice to have a base there, but "financial constraints currently prevent this".

Financial constraints were no bar to the foreign office "gifting" £268,444 worth of riot shields and riot clothing to the Kyrgyzstan police, however. Luckily for the rebellious Kyrgyz, who were attacked by the riot police before the increasingly authoritarian Akayev was forced to flee, Britain failed to deliver the kit.

An FO spokesperson told the *Eye* that the shields "for some reason haven't been properly procured"; but oddly there were "no plans to cancel" the gift.

The riot gear is paid for from the Global Conflict Prevention Fund, which foreign office minister Bill Rammell said was to "support the prevention, management and resolution of conflict, and post conflict reconstruction to help avoid the reignition of conflict at a later date". The gift was made through a mission of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which is training Kyrgyz police in things like, er, "crowd control".

PS: Britain's department for international development has given more than £4m to help the country with "structural adjustment". This includes "Privatisation in strategically important sectors (energy, telecoms, oil and gas, air transport, gold mining)" and "reducing the volume of public investment". It remains to be seen if these changes spark more unrest which requires the use of riot shields.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Sometimes the unexpected happens," said Premier Bob Carr in a statement to the New South Wales Parliament in Sydney, "that's one of the interesting things about life here on this planet. And frozen chickens hurtling through the stratosphere, then smashing through roof tiles into people's houses, is just one of the mysteries of existence. I can't explain it. I had no role in it."

Premier Carr was commenting on a spate of recent incidents in Newcastle, north of Sydney, during which frozen chickens have been seen plummeting earthwards at high speed, and punching holes through the roofs of houses when they reach the ground. "One theory is that birds are picking up the chicken

carcasses at a nearby dump," Senior Constable Tony Tamplin told journalists, "then dropping them in mid-flight, because they are too heavy. Alternatively, it might be the work of practical jokers, who are using a giant catapult to fire the frozen chickens at houses. But whatever the explanation is, the carcasses are hitting these homes with great force, and if they strike anyone, they could do great damage. I don't want to make light of this, but these are battery hens in more senses than one."

Later, Opposition leader John Brogden said, "I think it's a practical joke that's had its time. A frozen chicken travelling at speed could do a young child some serious damage. I mean, they're heavy." *(AFP, 10/2/05. Spotter: Ben Chisholme)*

– ● –

● *"It sounded good, but I agree it was an inappropriate choice of music," Harvey Shevalier admitted to reporters outside the Royal Canadian Legion building in Edmonton, Alberta. "We were just trying to find some suitable background music for a radio commercial for our lottery, and chose this track at random from a tape of marching music. The tracks didn't have titles, and there were no words, so it wasn't until the commercial was broadcast and the complaints started to flood in that we found out it was the* Horst Wessel Lied."

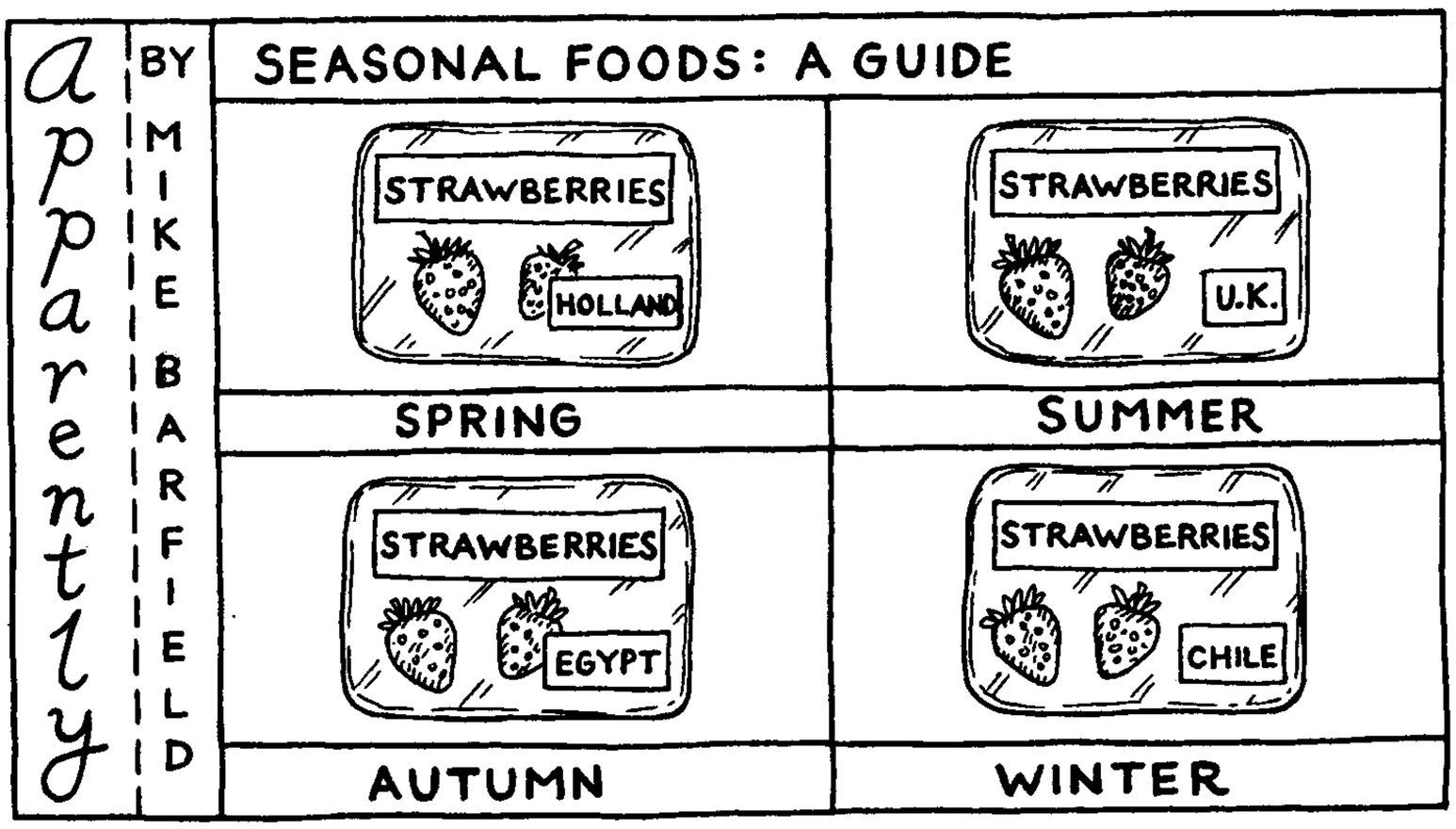
The commercial, which was pulled within hours of its first state-wide broadcasts, generated a record number of complaints across Alberta and Northwest Territories, due to its unwitting use of the Nazi party's official anthem. "The music was chosen by the Legion Lottery Committee, and judged suitable by the marketing and lottery management company we use, Stride Management. Members are very disgruntled that it got on air without somebody recognising what it was, but most people nowadays don't even know what the Horst Wessel song is. Now we've seen the words, we realise that it calls for Hitler salutes, and has lines like 'millions full of hope look up at the swastika,' and 'soon will fly Hitler flags over every street,' so it really wasn't appropriate at all. It was a good tune though." (The Vancouver Sun, 22/1/05. Spotter: Nicola Renouf)

– ● –

● "We've all had the experience of leaving the car in a multi-storey car park, then looking for it on another level," defence lawyer Martin Simpson told a court in Southport, Queensland. "And that is what occurred here, although obviously on a far more serious level. My client genuinely thought he was in his own hotel room, and that he'd caught another man in bed with his wife. That's why he acted as violently as he did."

Earlier, the prosecution had outlined the case against Matthew Waterton, a twenty-six-year-old surfer. "The defendant and his wife were staying in the Surf City Motel, and both went out drinking on the night in question. She returned to their room, 310, but he carried on drinking for several more hours. He eventually returned to the hotel in a confused state, tried to open the door of room 210 with his key, and when it wouldn't open, he kicked it and broke it down. Inside, he saw what he thought was his wife sleeping with another man. So he dragged the man out of bed, began punching him violently and repeatedly, and started yelling that he was going to throw him off the balcony. At that point, the woman turned on the lights and he realised she was not his wife. 'Sorry bro, I must have the wrong room,' he said, then left and went back to room 310, where he was arrested shortly afterwards."

Waterton was jailed for eighteen months for assault. *(Gold Coast Weekend Bulletin, 29-30/1/05. Spotter: Paul Molony)*



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent (and let's keep it that way!): Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE!!!

A personal message to every parishioner from your vicar

This is the most important month in the whole history of St Albion.

And the most important people in St Albion's are **you**, the congregation, the ordinary, down-to-earth, stupid people who come up to me in the street and shout rude things at me *(I really don't think we should put this bit in, Tony. A.Campbell, acting editor)*.

Week after week for the last eight years, you've been listening to me preaching about what I think!

Now it's your turn to tell me what **you** think! Because you're the boss, and what a heavy responsibility that is!

It's **my** job over the next few weeks to listen very carefully to what you have to say on all the big issues of the day, and then to explain to you why you are wrong!

That makes sense, doesn't it! So let's look at some of my so-called 'faults', shall we?

Apparently some of you have been saying that I smile too much!

Well, puh-lease!!

Since when has it been a sin to smile, for heavens sake? Especially when you've got so many reasons to smile!

Let's check 'em out, shall we?

Waiting lists at our college hospital – DOWN!

ASBOs on teenage yobs at the bus shelter – UP!

Number of chips served at St Albion's Primary School dinners – DOWN!

Number of apples served – UP!

Number of foxes killed by St Albion Vale foxhounds – THE SAME!

I could go on, but I'm too busy smiling!

I've even written a special chorus for us all to sing at next week's Evensong.

When you're smiling, when you're smiling,
The whole world votes for you
(repeat five times)

Words and music T. Blair. 2005

Of course I am not going to tell **you** how to vote when the great moment comes for **you** to decide on the future of the parish.

It is entirely a matter between **you** and your conscience!

If you wish to see our beloved church in ruins, with vampires flitting through the burnt out ashes of the nave, then of course you are perfectly entitled to support our

local solicitor Mr Howard!

Alternatively, you may feel that our parish affairs would be better handled by someone with a serious drink problem!

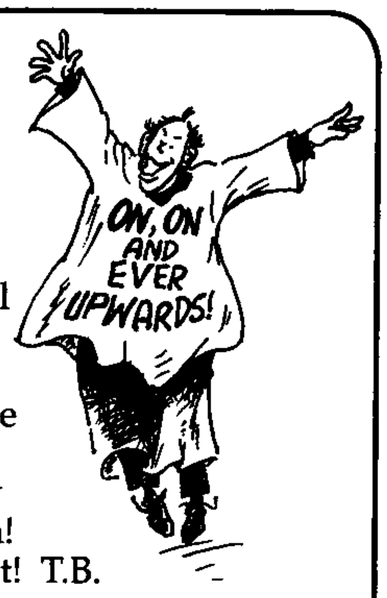
As I said at the beginning, it's entirely up to you! It's your choice. It's your vote and it will be your fault if you are stupid enough not to give your support to the most successful vicar St Albion's has ever had!

Yours in humility,

Tony

Thought For The Week

"Hail Thee Festival Day!"



I am sure you will all have noticed that May 5 is Ascension Day, to commemorate the moment when Our Lord was finally taken up into heaven! Worth thinking about! T.B.

(Thanks to local artist Mr de la Nougerede for the drawing)

CONGRATULATIONS!

I know you would all like me to pass on your congratulations to Mr Birt on his forthcoming divorce. As you know, Mr Birt works in a little office in the vicarage attic and is responsible for all those pie charts you see at the back of the church by Mrs Jowell's roulette wheel – please *do* take the time to look at them. Mr Birt has put a lot of work into them and has expressed his disappointment at the lack of interest shown by parishioners.

Can I especially ask the children not to fire their bee-bee guns into the Venn diagram about reorganising the flower roster? It is not a target! Well, it is actually – but not that sort!

Tony Blair

Prayer Aid

Some of our more Catholic readers may find this beautiful icon of "Our Lady of the Mantilla" helpful in focusing on their devotions. Reciting a couple of "Hail Cheries!" will add to the intensity of the spiritual experience.

Father Tony Blair

MISSING

Our curate Mr Milburn has not been seen since last Wednesday at about 4.30pm. If anyone knows of his whereabouts, would they please keep quiet about it until after the parish elections.

A. Campbell (acting Editor)

— Vale —

I am sure you would all wish to join me in regretting the passing of our former vicar, the Rev. J. Callaghan (1976-9). Older parishioners will have vivid memories of his brief time in charge of the parish, when rubbish piled up in the streets, corpses lay for weeks unburied in the churchyard and giant rats roamed freely through the parish, devouring toddlers as they were sent home from schools closed by striking miners! How different things are today, as the Rev. Callaghan was first to admit! On his deathbed he told me, with his much-loved and familiar smile, "Tony, I made a real mess of it. Thank the Lord you have come along to put it all right again. I hope they have the good sense to keep you on as vicar for ever". And with that he breathed his last and was gone! He was a very great man, although he wasn't any good! T.B.

The Vicar's Team No. 1 Mr Brown

I would like to introduce you to my closest and dearest colleague, Mr Brown.

As I have so often said in this newsletter before, Gordon has been a real rock in the past eight years, giving me his unqualified support 24/7. I cannot think of anyone who has contributed so much to my success! We all owe him a tremendous debt, namely £35 billion! T.B.

Mr Prescott writes:

This is a note to informalise you about the new arrangingments for the forthcoming parish elections. Unlike in previous elections, you will no longer have to walk through the cold and pouring rain to the primary school and/or stop watching your favourite TV soap 'Desperate Vicars' Wives'!

This time, you don't even have to fill in the voting paper. Just send it to me in the post and our team of trained helpers, Mr Shifti and Mr Khruq, will do it all for you! Just send your voting paper to me: J. Prescott, The Working Men's Club, St Albion's, and in due course it will be submitted to our returning officer in full accordance with the law! J.P.

The sort of headlines that fuel Charles's anti-press fury

GOD BLESS YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS AND YOUR BEAUTIFUL DUCHESS

THREE CHEERS FOR HAPPY COUPLE ON GLORIOUS DAY

TOGETHER AT LAST! HAPPY END TO EPIC LOVE STORY THAT SPANNED DECADES

FOR GOD'S SAKE, MAKE CHARLES KING NOW!

(That's enough lack of respect. Ed.)

THE CAMILLA I HAVE NEVER MET

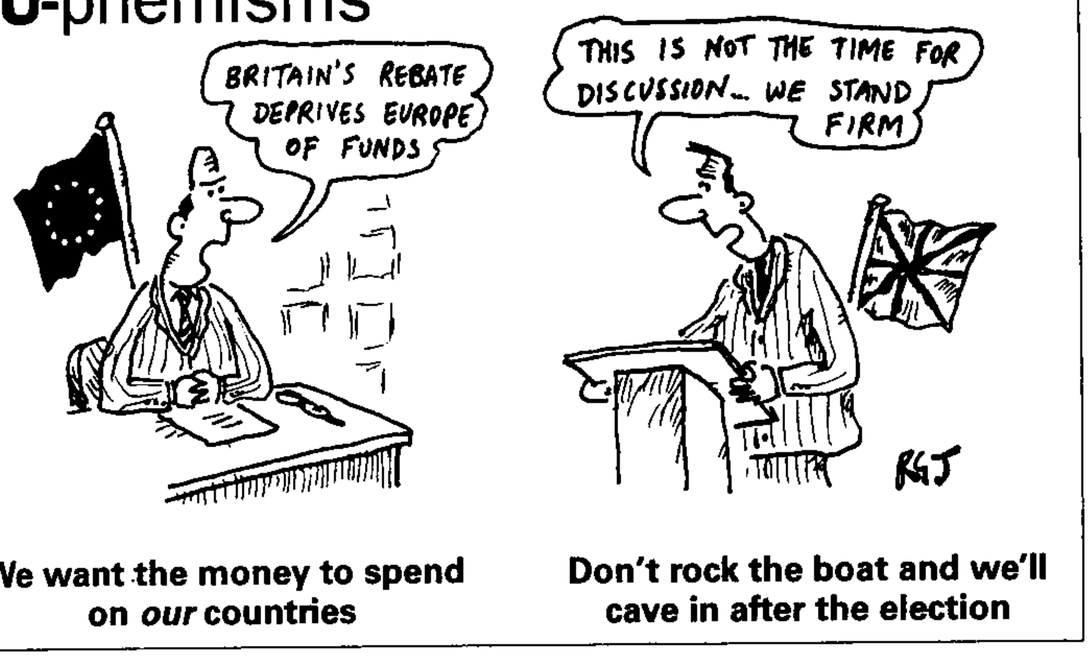
by Her Best Friend Lady Annabel Strypt-Pyne

THOSE of us who know Camilla know that she is a down-to-earth, good-hearted country woman who likes nothing better than to put her green-wellied feet up on her dog and indulge in a cigarette and a big glass of gin and tonic.

She is a long way from the public image of a woman who lives in the country, wears green wellies and likes a drink and a smoke.

No, the real Camilla is *(That's enough. Ed.)*

EU-phemisms



We want the money to spend on *our* countries

Don't rock the boat and we'll cave in after the election

New Films

Truly Mad and Deeply Dishonest (18)

A WONDERFUL love story by Anthony Mingella (director of "The Scottish Impatient"). Tony and Gordon are deeply in love although one of them is dead. But which one is it? Viewers will weep at this moving portrayal of grief in high places.

Eye rating: ZZZZZZZZZZZZ

How Lord Birt Broke The News About His Marriage To Lady Birt

THE EYE PRINTS THE TELL-TALE EMAIL

Dear Lady Birt,

Having undergone a thorough re-evaluation of our long-term cohabitation structure, I regret to inform you that, as a result of a rationalisation process, your position as marital partner has become surplus to requirements.

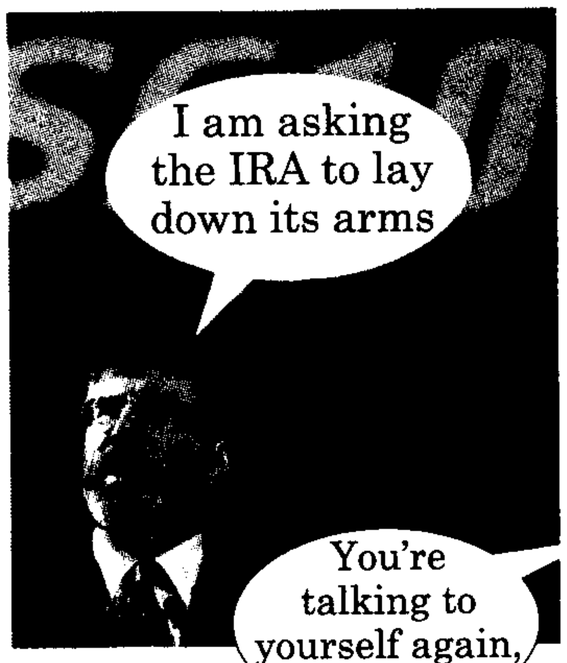
This follows a more competitive bid for conjugal services submitted by the independent rival Mrs Eithne Penpusher who will be replacing you as of midnight Tuesday.

You are therefore required to empty all drawers, closets, bathroom cabinets, etc, and outsource yourself at once. Your co-operation in the above arrangements will be appreciated.

Signed,

J. Birt, Department of Very Blue Skies Thinking,
C/o 10 Downing Street.

ADAMS NEW SHOCK!



ELECTION 2005

YOU DECIDE

THOSE SLIMMED-DOWN PARTY MANIFESTOS IN FULL

THE CONSERVATIVES
We're not Labour

NEW LABOUR
We're not the Conservatives

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS
We're not Labour or Conservative

GREATEST MAN IN HISTORY OF WORLD DIES

MILLIONS OF TRIBUTES FLOOD IN "AND STILL THEY COME..."

by **Our Entire Staff**

TODAY I watched with my own eyes as Sky TV showed us how the Eternal City has become a living river of pilgrims, all with only one thought in their minds – "Where's the toilet?" *(Surely, "We must pay our last respects to the greatest pope since St Peter"? Ed.)*

And still they came, from every corner of the globe and from all walks of life – young and old, rich and poor, black and white, gay and straight.

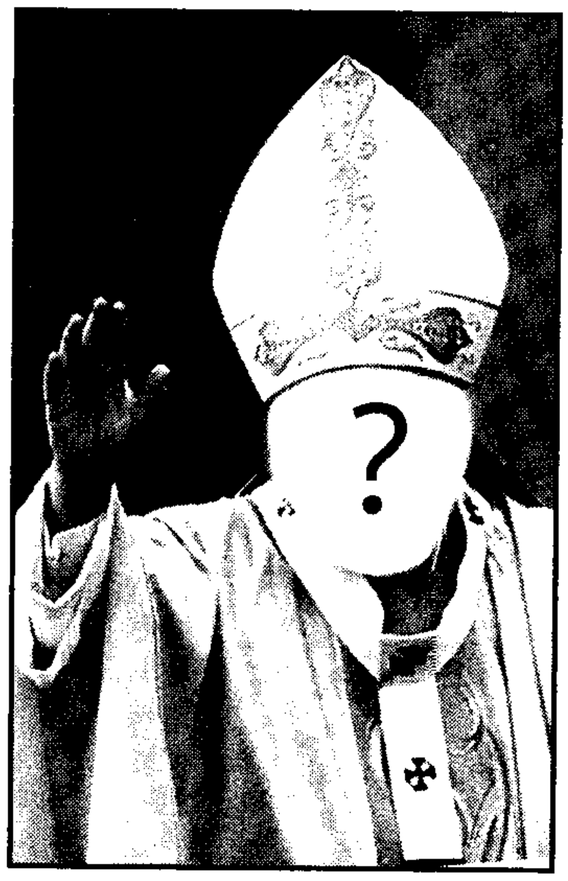
I saw nuns weeping on the shoulders of gnarled Samurai warriors.

Zulu tribesmen embraced Inuit grandmothers. Aztec priests solemnly conducted sacrifical rituals as a tribute to the man they knew simply as "El Cid". *(Can this be right? Ed.)*

And still they came. A human tide that stretched from the Tiber to Trieste.

And still my article flowed on, like a living river of drivel, filled with words of every shape and form – long and short, large and small, native and foreign – all mingled together in one mighty cornucopia of grief *(continued pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 94)*

© *All newspapers.*



Who Will Be The New Pope?

As the world's top cardinals huddle together behind locked doors, who are the hot tips for the man who will be the new "Top of the Popes"?

Joseph Ratpoison, 79, Archbishop of Warfarino. A noted hardline liberal, with profoundly conservative views on issues ranging from abortion to women priests, Ratpoison is a noted linguist, speaking 17 languages, including Croatian, Walloon and Klingon.

Ignatius Onanugo, 69, Archbishop of Rumbabwe. A liberal hardliner, with traditionalist views on issues ranging from abortion to women priests, Onanugu is hotly tipped to be the first black pope since Pope Othello I in the 4th Century BC.

Jesus-Maria Guevara, 83, Bishop of Santa Assassinato. A former revolutionary, who embraced liberation theology in the 1960s, Guevara is now an entrenched Conservative who opposes abortion and women priests. Guevara is hotly tipped to be the first Mexican pope since Gonzales I ('The Speedy') in the 16th Century.

P.D. O'Phile, 75, Archbishop of New Dworkin. An outspoken liberal, who embraced a number of choirboys in his diocese, O'Phile is currently serving 27 years in the New Dworkin penitentiary and is completing a PhD thesis on the life of the Blessed Michael of Jackson.

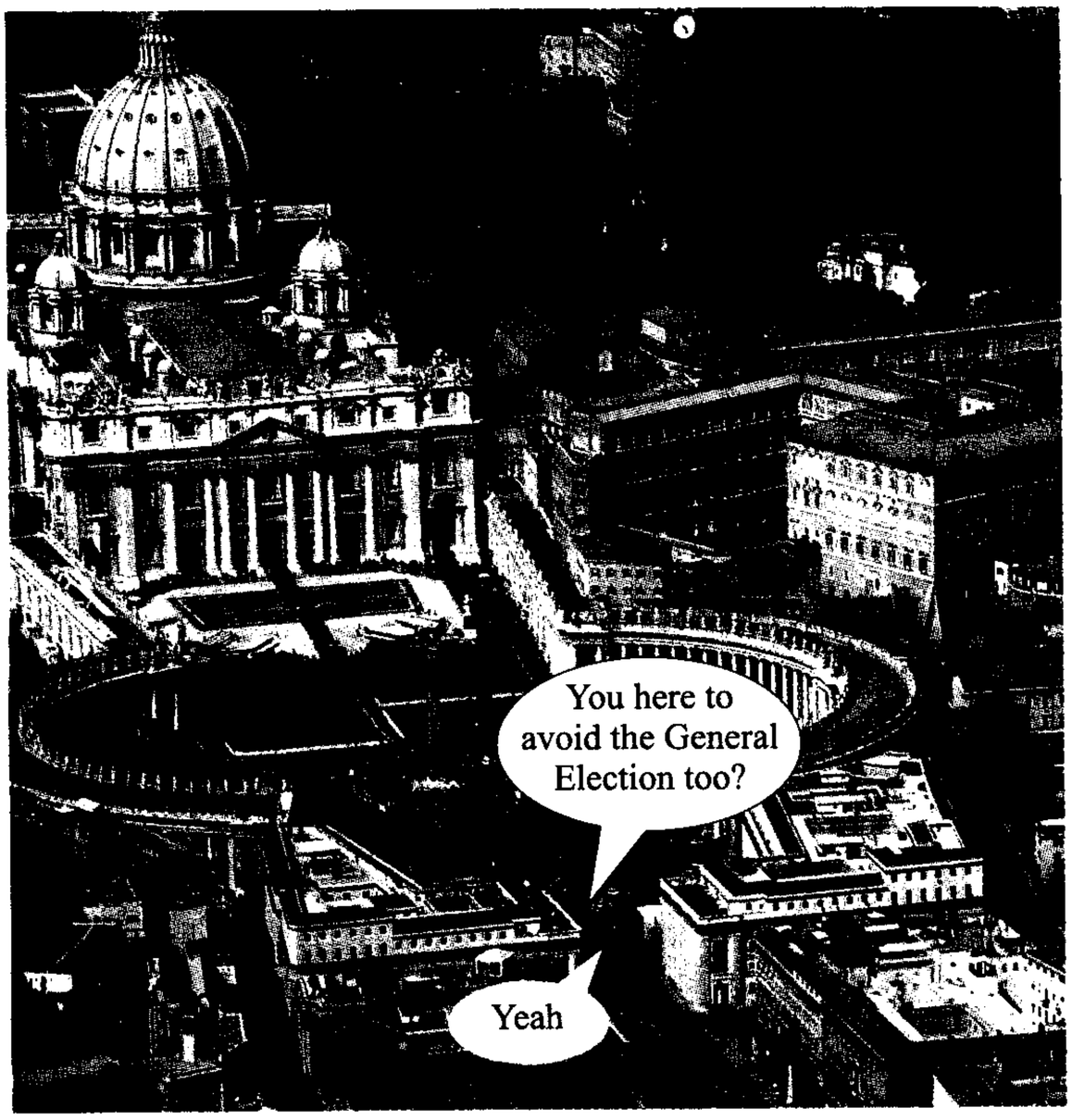
DAVE SPART (Co-Chair of the Respect Anti-War, Blair and Foxhunting Support Group, Bethnal Green) on the death of the late Pope John-Paul II.

Er... the sickening spectacle of the mass media filling thousands of pages with sycophantic tributes to the late Pope, claiming that he was somehow a champion of freedom, when he was in fact nothing less than a fascist autocrat and mass-murderer who was personally responsible for the deaths of millions of Aids victims throughout Africa and the Third World, not to mention a hardline homophobe who refused to allow gays and lesbians their freedom to marry in Catholic churches, er, how could he claim to be a 'friend of the poor' as the capitalist media have hypocritically pretended when he lived a life of luxury in huge palaces surrounded by paintings worth billions of pounds which could have been sold to raise money for the Aids victims he had killed, er, not to mention his lifelong hatred of women as was shown by his refusal to allow women to become popes, er, plus also his reactionary attempt to denigrate progressive left-wing regimes, such as Poland, the Soviet Union, Kosovo etc must mark him down as the arch-fascist of all time – on a par with, dare one say it, Adolf Hitler and Michael Howard.

You can read more of Dave Spart's forthright comments on the late Pope in the *New Spartsman*, the *Grauniad*, the *Indescribably Sparty*, and on his personal website www.spart-er-er.co.uk.

BUSH LEADS MOURNING

MILLIONS FLOCK TO ROME



CROWDS GATHER, WAITING FOR APPOINTMENT

by Our Religious Staff **Christina O'Booze**

SOMBRE Dr Who worshippers tonight flocked to Television Centre in London after the BBC announced that Chris Eccleston had uttered his last line as Dr Who.

The announcement came from a sombre-suited BBC press officer, with tears welling up in his eyes: "It is with great sadness that we can confirm that, as of 9.25pm this evening, Chris has uttered his last words as Dr Who".

Devoted Whovians worldwide say that 'Chris the Great' was one of the greatest of all modern Dr Who's, second only to 'Tom Baker the Fourth'.

Thousands of devoted Whovians will now maintain a silent vigil outside TV Centre until a puff of white smoke emerging from the Director General's office signifies that the world has a new Dr Who.

ON OTHER PAGES

● Eccleston to be new Pope. "I'll take papacy into 21st century," vows TV Chris **3**

● Shock as Mugabe kisses Prince Charles at Royal Wedding. "It was dark," say Royal Aides **5**

'MAKE HIM A SAINT' says Lord Bragg

IT WAS clear from the passionate chanting outside the chapel that the people wanted only one thing. For Prince Charles to be made a saint.

As they queued in their tens from five minutes before the ceremony began, they spoke with one voice. Said one pilgrim, Lord Bragg (94), "We love him. He is the world's greatest human being. He is Charles The Great. He is the father of us all."

Although Karol Winsjor has yet to perform any major miracles, he has, like St Francis, established an extraordinary rapport with plants, and his conversation with them is considered by many to be miraculous.

Holy C of E

So surely it is now time for the Church to move quickly and to accommodate the wishes of millions of devoted believers by canonising its most worthy son as Saint Charles The Goon.

Advertisement

From The House of Gnome

THE COMBINED POPE PAUL AND ROYAL WEDDING SOUVENIR CRUET SET

AT LAST, a memento to commemorate the historic days of April 2005! This incredible 2-in-1 cruet souvenir unites the death of His Holiness John Paul the Great with the wedding of His Royal Highness Prince Charles to Mrs Parker Bowles.

Made from genuine bone-style china at the famous potteries of Royal Gnomewood, your magnificent salt 'n' pepper 'n' mustard combo will not only enhance your dinner table, but will remind you and your loved ones of the most moving days of the 21st century. Sculpted by Royal and Papal Cruet Artist, Sir Castro di Spectatori, NBG, this heritage solution is not only an object of sublime beauty but will be worth a lot of money in years to come.

Do not be disappointed – send £289.99 at once to:
Gnome Cruet Offer, PO Box 94,
The Deng Xiao Ping Trading Estate, Beijing.

PLUS

FREE PRINCE RAINIER TOOTHPICK HOLDER

STOP PRESS!
The value of this item has been greatly increased by the fact that it bears the wrong date, ie 5th November 1974.

POETRY CORNER

Lines On The Marriage Of Charles, Prince of Wales, to Mrs Camilla Parker Bowles by the Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion.

I took your news
Into my garden space
(Which is basically a garden
But sounds more poetic)
To think what I could
Say in a poem.

Because that is my job.
I have to write poems on
These occasions.

So, as I said,
I took your news
Into my garden space.

The flowers are blossoming
Like your romance.
There are new shoots
Growing below
The dirty laundry line
Of scandal.

That's a metaphor, you see –
Green shoots are like
Blossoming flowers.
They signify a new
Beginning.

A new beginning. Yes.
That's what the poem needs.
And probably a new end.

But, apart from that, I
Think it's quite good.

© Andrew GoingThroughTheMotions

If you would like to know more about the creative process behind Andrew's poem, you can visit our website – www.oldrope.com

Zimbabwe Telegraph
FRIDAY APRIL 15 2005

BRITISH ELECTION RIGGED
Mugabe Lashes Blair

by Our Man In London **Lunchtime O'Noose**

ZIMBABWEAN observers were last night expressing their fears that the British general election will be invalid, thanks to widespread vote-rigging and fraud by the leader of the ruling Labour Party, the power-crazed Tony Mugablair.

Already, evidence is mounting from all over the country that Mugablair's henchmen in such remote settlements as Birmingham are forging huge quantities of postal votes in order to deliver an overwhelming Zanulabour victory.

One of the few independent judges left in Britain with the courage to speak his mind yesterday compared his country's corrupt voting system to that of a 'banana republic'.

Our beloved leader President Mugabe was rightly outraged by the horrifying news of how Britain's election was being stolen by its hated dictator. "Mugablair," he said, "has shocked the civilised world. He should step down at once and allow the real winner of the election to take over as rightful leader of the British empire, ie myself."

NEW MAN TO REPLACE DISGRACED TORY

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

THE TORY leadership was quick to replace Tory tax rebel Howard Flightfromreality, who had been expelled from the party and sentenced to death for what Mr Michael Howardycustard had described as "an act of personal treachery without parallel since the days of Judas Iscariot".

Mr Flightfromreality had been tape-recorded at a private meeting, saying, "It might not be an altogether bad idea later on, if we get in, to maybe think about ways in which taxes might not have to rise quite as quickly as they obviously will have to in order to pay for Mr Howard's admirable spending plans".

Last night, in place of Mr Flighty, the local Tory party were told unanimously to select their new candidate, Mr Right Herbert.

After Mr Herbert Flight had accepted the nomination, it was discovered that in 2001 he had written an article in the *Spectacularlyboring* calling for a "secret Tory agenda" involving massive tax cuts and the sacking of all civil servants.

A Flighter Not A Quitter

Mr Herbert von Karryonlosing quickly issued a public statement claiming that he had been misquoted by himself, and that what he had actually written was that he agreed "110 percent with everything that Mr Michael Howard had ever said in the past or would ever say in the future, so help me God, Amen."

Count Dracula is 788.

the PREMIERSH*TS

ELECTION ROUND-UP
DAY 94

GOVERNMENT DEFENDS 'POSTAL VOTING SYSTEM'

THE GOVERNMENT has defended its plans to increase greatly the amount of postal voting in the next general election, despite a ruling that widespread fraud took place during postal voting in last year's local elections in Birmingham.

"We have double-checked all the votes cast in next month's election and nothing seems amiss with them, whoops," said a Number 10 *(cont. p. 94)*

BLAIR WARNS OF 'NASTY RIGHT-WING CAMPAIGN'

THE Prime Minister has warned that in the run-up to the general election, the British public should prepare themselves for what he dubbed a "rather nasty right-wing campaign".

A Labour spokesman said, "There's going to be a lot of unpleasant right-wing campaigning over the next few weeks, and if those wishy-washy Conservatives don't like it, they know what they can do."

EDUCATION BLOW TO LABOUR

THE Commons Education Selection Committee has said that action needs to be taken after it was revealed that 17% of 11-year-olds can't read.

"We believe that a system used in schools abroad, called 'Teaching Children To Read', could be the answer to solving this problem," said the committee chairman.

The Government, however, rejected the Comittee's findings, saying that the Department of Education had looked into the system of 'Teaching Children To Read' used in other countries and found that it'd be far too difficult to introduce into British schools.

BORN TO BE QUEEN CONSORT

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *Born To Be Queen, La Dame Aux Camillas, Heir of Sorrows*, etc.

THE STORY SO FAR: After months of turmoil and confusion, Camilla and Charles have finally tied the knot and are honey-mooning in the ancient palace of Balmoral.

Now read on...

"HAPPY, darling?" Charles placed an arm tenderly around his new bride's shoulders as they gazed out together over the moonlit waters of Loch Loonie and the distant snow-capped peaks of Ben Elton.

"Bloody happy, Chazza!"

Camilla drew deeply on her first full-strength Senior Citizen untipped cigarette since breakfast, and watched a garland of smoke curling up towards the ceiling of the Prince Albert Room, with its massive teak four-poster bed in the shape of a battleship – a present to Queen Victoria from her cousin, the Grand-Duke Michael of Holsten-Carlsberg.

Camilla shivered slightly in the chill Highland air and pulled the lilac satin peignoir (a wedding gift purchased at the Henley-on-Thames branch of "Knickers 'R Us" by Sir John and Lady Mortimer) closer round her ivory shoulders.

Could it really be true, the moment she had dreamed of since she was a young woman snatching the fruits of forbidden love behind the strawberry tent at one of Lord Cowpat's legendary polo tournaments?

So often in the past few frantic weeks, it had seemed as if this moment would never come.

Everything had conspired against the wedding she had longed for.

The mix-up over the service in St George's Chapel, when it had been discovered by some beastly lawyer that it would be a criminal offence for them to get married there.

All the stupid speculation in the newspapers as to whether she would be called 'Queen' or just plain 'Duchess of Windsor'.

And then, of course, there was the untimely death of His Holiness the Pope, who had chosen just the wrong moment to pass away...

No wonder Charles had lost his temper on the ski-slopes when some impertinent little journalist from the BBC had asked him whether he was looking forward to his wedding.

But in the end, somehow, it had all worked out. It had, after all, been the wedding of her dreams.

The threatened snow had failed to materialise, and instead a brilliant April sun had shone on the cheering crowd lining the streets as they did their Saturday shopping. "Come on Hedgehunter!" the people had cheered as the Rolls-Royce Phantom X waited behind the Tesco lorry at the traffic lights leading to the register office.

And then there was the civil ceremony, the service, the reception – it all went by in a blur of happy snapshots.

The sweet, smiling archbishop with the silver beard joining them as one... the Queen kindly reminding her not to smoke in the Royal Chapel because they had already had one fire there... the young Princes up to their usual pranks pretending to be drunk and tying old boots to the train of her wedding dress... and all those people she had seen on the television. Was that really Mr Bean in a top hat...? And the gallant Sir Stephen Fry, telling everyone how "handsome" she was... ?

And even Charles's friend Tara Rara-Boomdeay had put on some clothes for a change... Yes! What a day! It would be forever embedded in the photograph album of her mind.

And now here, secluded from the world in this romantic fairy-tale castle, they could at last be man and wife in the full sense of the word...

THERE was a discreet knock at the door. It was Auld Angus McVittie, the ancient retainer. He was carrying a huge silver dish, bearing twelve dozen oysters.

"Your late great-grandfather Edward VII always swore by them when he entertained his married ladies up from London," he announced as he placed them on a table by the bed.

Charles blushed. "That will be all, McVittie," he hastily admonished the departing retainer.

As the door closed, there was a strange wailing sound from the terrace beneath the window.

The newly-weds peered down through the darkness to where, far below, a lone piper from one of Charles's beloved regiments, the 49th Highland Buffoons, was warming up to play a selection of hits from *South Pacific*.

"Listen, darling!" Charles exclaimed. "He's playing our tune!"

And so he was. The plangent strains of *Some Enchanted Evening* floated up through the night, just as they had done for every royal honeymoon couple since time immemorial.

As this romantic serenade died away on the night air, Charles moved expectantly towards the bed, where Auld Angus had laid out the tartan pyjamas he always wore when north of the border.

Camilla stubbed out her cigarette and turned down the lights. They were alone at last, just the two of them in the silence.

"Oh, Chazza!" she whispered.

"Oh, Cammers!" he breathed.

"Oh, excuse me, Your Royal Highness." A familiar voice broke in on their intimacy, as the red-headed figure of Nicholas Witchell emerged from underneath the bed.

"How are you enjoying your honeymoon, sir?" asked the BBC's royal correspondent in his silkiest tones.

So this was what her new life was to be like, thought Camilla, her heart sinking like a stone.

Outside, the stars in the velvet heaven seemed to go out one by one, as the dark snowclouds gathered down the vasty sides of Glen Morangie.

(To be continued)

© S. Krin, The Stansted Ryanair Romantic Bestseller Collection.

Polly

Penny

In this extract from their hysterical autobiographical collection of old emails, ***Polly Filler*** *and her sister* ***Penny Dreadful*** *exchange their thoughts on modern motherhood, useless partners and lovable toddlers!* You've Got A Nice Au Pair! *(HarpieCollins £9.99)*

From: Polly
To: Penny

We have been trying to potty-train the hamster! Toddler Charlie keeps letting it out of the cage where it wees and poos all over the house. Guess who has to clean it all up?

Not the Useless Simon of course, who is too busy watching Pro-Celebrity Extreme Lawn Mowing on Sky Gardening presented by A.A. Gill and Paul Ross to help! No – it's all left to the woman to do, ie the new au pair Drjkz, from Kyrgyzstan, who arrived speaking no English but now seems to understand the word "ironing" perfectly!!

From: Penny
To: Polly

Very amusing story about the hamster. I've got one about a gerbil having triplets while my husband tries to put up shelves! Do you think we could get a book out of this? After all, my husband is the editor of this newspaper, so my guess is that we'll get a serialisation deal at least!

From: Polly
To: Penny

Let's not put the last email in, ok?

© P. Filler and P. Dreadful, the Daily Telegraph

Heath's Private View

ROBERT CRUMB AT WHITECHAPEL GALLERY
JEEZ! HE'S REALLY FAMOUS! I COULD HAVE BOUGHT HIM FOR PEANUTS!
ZAP!
WAP
£15000
£10,000
GET OFF OUR BACKS
HOLY SHIT, THEY SAY HES AS GOOD AS BRUEGEL!
I SHOULD HAVE STAYED WITH THE OLD COCK-SUCKER
HEATH AFTER CRUMB

Advertisement

CANCEL THE DEBT

Make Poverty History!

Many people in the first world are being crippled by the huge amount of interest that they have to pay on money that they have borrowed. Take the sad case of Rosie, an ex-BBC broadcaster in England, who is struggling desperately to pay off the vast debts which – through no fault of anyone else – she has run up on various credit cards. Her life has been ruined by the unscrupulous western money lenders who are now trying to make her pay them back. Please join us in signing a petititon to let poor Rosie off her debts and allow her to keep her large London house, her two buy-to-let flats, her "super-chic" Paris apartment and her range of badly fitting off-the-shoulder dresses. Thank you.

I think Rosie Millard should have her debt cancelled. I am over 18 and completely mad.

Signed.....

FURY OF NEASDEN FANS AT 'FOOTBALL DISGRACE'

by **E.I. Addio**, Our Man In The Directors' Box With The Russian Dictionary And A Billion Pounds To Spend On Crisps

THE SOCCER world was rocked to its foundations yesterday when a game of football broke out in the middle of the traditional Saturday afternoon punch-up at Neasdenbridge Stadium.

The fight was into its 52nd minute when suddenly two Neasden players began passing the ball to each other as they ran down the pitch towards their opponents' goal.

LOON ARMY

Said Neasden's ashen-faced supremo Ron Knee, "This is a black day which has marred the face of the beautiful game. They are basically good lads who turn up each week and beat each other up – which is what the fans come to see.

"The shocking sight of Lee Yobb and Kevin Shrek suddenly kicking a football will be etched on my mind for years to come."

Neasden FC chairman Buffy Cohenovich, proprietor of one of the world's largest oil-to-laundromat conglomerates, was quick to register his own disapproval of the events.

"I pay these men to fight, not to kick balls around. They have brought dishonour and shame on the good name of the Squirrels. They will be suspended until the beginning of the next game – and let that be a lesson to them."

PUNCH OF THE DAY

Neasden fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) soon added their angry voices to the growing chorus of outrage.

Said Sid, "The fight was going really well, and we were all enjoying it. There were young kiddies in the crowd for whom Yobb and Shrek are role models. What must they have thought watching Lee bend the ball round the side of the wall for Kevin to head home?

"It has probably scarred them for life."

Ron Knee is 59.

Late Result

Kyrgyzstan Athletico 0
AFC Neasden 0

(Match abandoned as a mark of respect to the late Pope)

DIARY

Jane Fonda's Workout (1982) remains to this day the biggest-selling home video of all time (17 million copies).

Up until then, women had felt bound up in the universal paradigm of patriarchal hierarchy. But by moving my body to the shakey, shakey, beat, I taught them how to empower themselves. All they had to do was put on a skin-tight leotard over their naked bodies and perform pelvic exercises – "and in, and out, and one more time" – to the sound of The Bee Gees. "Shake that butt – and in, two three, and out, two three – c'mon, shake that butt and – yes! – feel the burn!"

An awful lot of women have written to me since, or spoken their moving testimonies to me in person, declaring that these instructions profoundly affected their lives not only as women but as world-citizens. Clearly, we were on to something that mattered far, far more than just how a person looked. It was all about empowerment. For the first time in history, women the world over could look at me pumping my chest to the beat – "and out, and in, and out" – in my stretch-lycra one-piece leotard and they could say to themselves, "Yes, I too can become a world-famous Academy Award-winnning actress and highly respected political activist – with a truly terrific body to match!"

JANE FONDA

I was just 26 years of age, naive and inexperienced, when I first met the famous Roger Vadim. He was wearing a dark, well-cut French suit. My God, he was handsome. And I was wearing nothing: yes, when I'd awoken that morning, I'd clean forgotten to put my clothes on!

Before I had a chance to apologise for my oversight, we were making out passionately on the couch. I was feeling so empowered. That couch was the boat on which I was embarking upon a long, hard journey to conquer my fear of intimacy. As his hands clenched my butt, I began to realise that in a truly profound way I was searching desperately for a way to come home, to re-discover myself as a woman, and to engage with our patriarchal society by confronting it on its own terms.

One night Roger brought home a beautiful red-haired woman and took her into bed with me. I later discovered she was a high-class call-girl. Roger explained that between the three of us we had a duty to shake off the old capitalist belief in the private ownership of our bodies and what better place to start our universal campaign for shared ownership of the human body than in his bed, right here, right now? Roger by name, Roger by nature: I took my cues from him and threw myself into the threesome with all the skill and enthusiasm of the thrice-nominated Academy Award-winning actress that I am. My acceptance speech at the end was, Roger assured me, truly moving.

Sometimes there were three of us in that bed, sometimes four, often five, six, seven or eight. Lighting a cigarette at the end of it all often lasted a number of minutes and was a considerable expense, so we had a cigarette dispensing machine installed in the closet. It could be a muddle of arms and legs, with endless cries of "Has anyone seen my left hand?" Once when it was all over, I got out of bed, only to realise my head was still on the pillow. Looking again, I realised it wasn't me who had got out of the bed at all, but the red-haired girl.

The mornings after, when Vadim was gone, I would truly enjoy chatting to those women over coffee.

For me, it was a way to bring some humanity to our relationship, an antidote to male objectification, a way of demonstrating my absolute humanitarian refusal to espouse the dominant bourgeois view of worker and owner in Western society, and I got so much out of talking to them on a one-to-one basis.

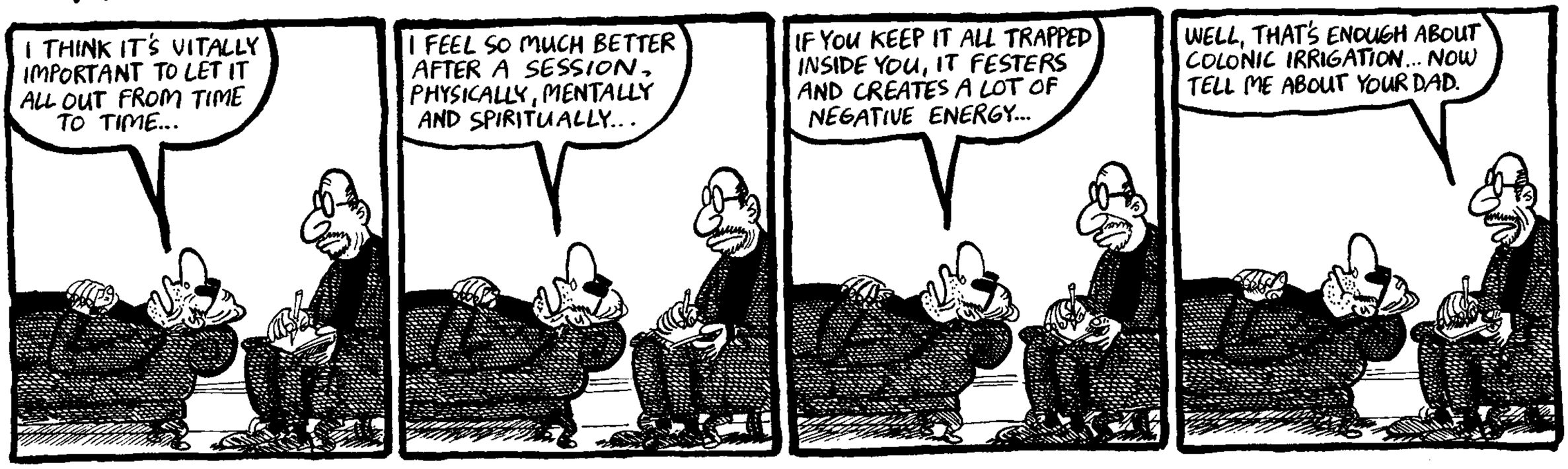
Once they had finished their coffee, I would ask them considerately – woman to woman – if they wouldn't mind just doing the odd bit of tidying about the house, and maybe see to that upstairs closet, and could they please keep it quiet, as I had to learn my lines for my next major motion picture, *Hedda Gabler*, which I played in a chain-mail bikini, in order to bring out Hedda's deep sense of paranoia and inner angst.

What was it that attracted me to billionaire Ted Turner? For me, there was something irresistibly boyish about the guy. Maybe it was the way he always wore shorts and took his yo-yo with him wherever he went; maybe it was his habit of sticking his tongue out at strangers, then pretending to shoot them dead with his index finger. Whatever – I was hooked on the guy. Being on the arm of Ted Turner was a new experience. We would often jet around the globe, advising world leaders. Ted was always sensitive to their need to rediscover their Inner Child, and they in turn responded to his impish sense of fun. Once when we were ushered into the Kremlin to meet with President Mikhail Gorbachev, Ted challenged him to a spitting contest. Mikhail lost, so Ted insisted he remove his trousers. Ted wore them on his head until Mikhail demanded them back. It was a truly wonderful bridge-building exercise between our two great nations.

My dad was incapable of sharing his emotions. Like all men, he was cold and unresponsive. So often, I would ask him – beg him – to become an embryo again, to place his thumb between his lips and curl up in a little ball and squeeze up close to my stomach and feel all the great pain and joy of re-birth. "Let me be your mom, Dad," I said, with so much generosity in my heart. Why, I even had his diapers ready. But Dad would just clam up on me and change the subject to something cold and manly, like fishing or car-maintenance.

That is what the patriarchal system has done to our men. They think the only things their wives and daughters want are their balls, when what we really want is their embryos, so that – yes! – they can be born again, this time as women, or – hey, why not? – as the cutest little puppies. How I longed to be closer to my dad. But for the present, I had to embark on my greatest role to date, Lady Macbeth. After extensive conversation with director, I decided to bring out her very real drive for empowerment in a masculine world by playing her without any clothes on.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


I THINK IT'S VITALLY IMPORTANT TO LET IT ALL OUT FROM TIME TO TIME...
I FEEL SO MUCH BETTER AFTER A SESSION, PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY AND SPIRITUALLY...
IF YOU KEEP IT ALL TRAPPED INSIDE YOU, IT FESTERS AND CREATES A LOT OF NEGATIVE ENERGY...
WELL, THAT'S ENOUGH ABOUT COLONIC IRRIGATION... NOW TELL ME ABOUT YOUR DAD.

Literary Review

What a gay daze

A Young Man's Passage
Julian Clary
(Ebury Press £17.99)

Straight
Boy George
(Century £17.99)

IN THE old days of publishing, the word "sensitive" on a book jacket inevitably meant "the author is homosexual".

"Sensitive", of course is long gone from gay literature, or indeed from most other forms of literature, proudly thrown down by rampaging phalli and Mordor costumes. And yet here and there, notably in the up-market gay novel, its frail blossoms can still be found cast knowingly across the puddles of bodily fluids. Works such as Alan Hollinghurst's Booker-winning *The Line of Beauty*, for example, are distinguished by their odd, but in genre terms wholly characteristic, mix of sleaze and sensibility: high aesthetics and low company, James (Henry, that is) and jism, furniture by Sheraton and choreography by Frankie Goes To Hollywood. Push this tendency down to the lower rungs of the literary ladder, into the thronged and clamorous stoat-hatch occupied by the gay male entertainer, and the chances are that it will result in books like *Straight* and *A Young Man's Passage*.

The connections between messrs Clary and O'Dowd, pictured together at one point among the photographic sections of the George extravaganza, turn out to be passing strong. Quite apart from the dressing up, there is the Catholic upbringing, not to mention the faint thought of a tape-recorder lurking somewhere amid the authorial armoury.

Clever boys, too. Clary went to Goldsmith's and likes introducing his chapters with epigraphs from Wilde, Marvell and Stevie Smith, while even George can talk knowledgeably about art and throw out a decent opinion or two about rap and hip-hop.

Of the two confessionals, alas, George's is by far the more tedious: a rackety, rambling pageant of settled scores, bitchy effrontery and frenetic attempts to breathe heat into the coals of some exceedingly ancient scene controversies. "At the dinner Elton gave me his number and I said I would call him. When I did the number had been changed." "Shortly before the LA toilet incident..." "In a nutshell the issue is: cocks up arses." "I have to accept that not everyone likes me." It was a *very* bad idea, by the way, to include the song lyrics with which the book intermittently effloresces.

With Master Clary, on the other hand, there is a very faint sense of something going on, of a personality (and not a wholly unsympathetic one, as the late Anthony Powell might have put it) obtruding from among the hectic traffic of meaty pick-ups and sour south London dawns.

Despite the usual feline flourishes in the direction of anyone who stood in his way, you get the feeling that Jules here found the constraints that invariably attend this kind of glam-world progress just a tiny bit of a strain and that he'd really rather have been at home in Holloway having a cup of tea.

And then, as in all those gay novels, there are moments when a tremendous scent of fugitive lyricism suddenly drifts across the page, sweeping him back to his grandparents' Norfolk village or the suburban rumpus rooms of his childhood.

George's reminiscences of India, where he goes in search of spirituality, are a variation on this theme. Elsewhere, it's clear that Ziggy Stardust – *the* great influence on modern gay entertainment – has a great deal to answer for.

Mercifully, *A Young Man's Passage* touches only indirectly on sexual politics. George, on the other hand, has some pointed remarks on bigotry's habit of disguising itself in a supposedly more liberal age. Tolerance and acceptance are very different things, he suggests, and most gay men rarely want to celebrate their sexuality. Oh well. It would be a great shame if he assumed that the reason most readers will find *Straight* a hugely unedifying work has anything to do with homosexuality. Let me assure him that there are a variety of other reasons.

Short stories, short changed

How We Are Hungry
Dave Eggers
(Hamish Hamilton, £12.99)

THIS is a collection of so-called short stories. "So-called" because although there are 15 titles listed on the contents page, only five or six of them are proper stories. These are padded out to book length with a number of other items.

Some are mere sketches of a page or two, the sort of thing Dave Eggers puts in his column in the back of the *Guardian* Weekend magazine. One is called "What It Means When a Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Own Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him from His Vehicle and Then Mutilates Him in the Dust".

The story which follows is barely more than a page long, and seems little more than an excuse for the typically extravagant title. Another item that apparently aims at post 9/11 topicality is "When They Learned to Yelp", which seems to be a parable about naive spoilt Americans suddenly waking up to the pain of mass-terrorism.

The item called "Notes for a Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone" tries to make a virtue of its incompleteness, but fails because in the end any story to be told is submerged in what is essentially another piece of that baneful narcissistic genre, writing about writing. It jots down ideas for a plot, suggestions for names of characters and snippets of dialogue, but fails to develop matters any further. One entry goes: "Basil's older brother is either very sharp and feisty, or has lost his lucidity and lives in a constant-care facility. Probably the latter." Well, it's either one or the other. Eggers seems to want to have his cake and eat it.

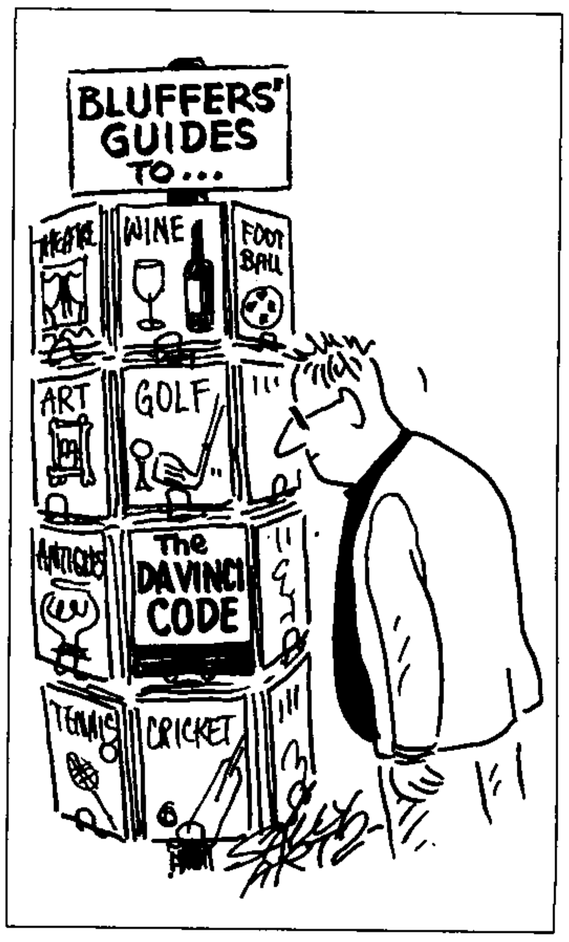
While most art requires some effort on the part of the recipient, this begins to look like mere delegation of the hard slog with which its author cannot in the end be bothered. If it wasn't good enough to finish, why include it here?

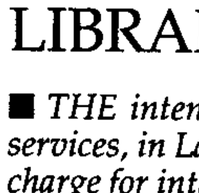
More playful still (or demanding of the reader) is the story consisting of nothing more than its title, "There Are Some Things He Should Keep To Himself", followed by several blank pages (which this particular reader found handy to jot down some Notes for a Review of a Man Who Will Not Write a Decent Story).

Of the stories properly so called, most feature some element of travel, though usually the foreign parts act only as backdrop. An exception, and the best of the bunch, is "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly", about a woman called Rita climbing Mount Kilimanjaro with a small group of other hikers and a much larger group of native porters. Rita wants to prove her stoicism and independence of spirit but in the end she's doing it because her sister wanted her to and when she gets going it's another hiker, called Grant, who sets the pace. One of the other hikers gets sick and wants to go back but when death comes it is not to the expected victim. Rita either cannot or will not understand what has happened until she's made it to the top, when it becomes clear that she's been deceiving herself all along about a number of things.

There is undeniably something heroic about Eggers' refusal to be bound by the conventions of traditional literary form or the requirements of the publishing industry. But it is not a heroism that readers will necessarily thank him for when confronted with the task of sorting the wheat from the chaff in his work. No doubt his admirers will point out that the same could have been said of James Joyce, or even that grandaddy of the baggy monster shaggy dog tale, Laurence Sterne.

One of Eggers' most admirable qualities is the hospitality he has shown to other writers as an editor of the literary journals *Might* and, latterly, *McSweeney's*. But if this book is chiefly worth reading for "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly" then it's not worth buying for that because the same story appears in a recent anthology, *The Best of McSweeney's* (£17.99), edited by Eggers and containing a selection of work by such equally celebrated contemporaries as David Foster Wallace, Rick Moody and, from our own shores, Zadie Smith. For quality and variety, it's worth the extra fiver.





BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ IRONY is obviously lost on those in charge at the University of Durham – just ask the author Bill Bryson.

Bryson has just been appointed chancellor, replacing Peter Ustinov, and as the author of two accessible books on the history of the English language, *Mother Tongue* and *Made in America*, Bryson would be a popular choice among linguistics students at the university. Except there aren't going to be any. Durham's department of linguistics and English language, one of the highest ranked in the UK, is in the process of closing and took its last undergraduate students in 2003.

LIBRARY NEWS

■ *THE intention of two more library services, in Lancashire and Trafford, to charge for internet use, may be against the law, MPs on the culture select committee believe.*

Fees are already charged for using "People's Network" computers in libraries in 17 local authorities, including Cornwall, Peterborough and Camden; and ministers say it's up to individual councils whether or not to charge. But a report on public libraries from the culture, media and sport select committee has concluded that charging "contravenes at least the spirit" of the 1964 public libraries and museums act.

The law only allows libraries to charge for facilities that "go beyond those ordinarily provided". Given that the People's Network is now installed in every library in Britain, the MPs noted, it should obviously be free. MPs were also worried that despite spending £120m to install the network, the government is unwilling to look after it.

Pseuds Corner

Brick Lane is a fissure between the virtual and the actual, between a protected city of pastiche, crags and cliffs like frozen waterfalls, and an occulted place with deep reservoirs of pain and memory.

IAIN SINCLAIR, review of Jeremy Gavron, An Acre of Barren Ground: Or The History of Everyone Who Ever Lived in Brick Lane, *Evening Standard*

We have doubled the citizenship of our family and life became more recognisable than ever before. Oh, Oprah, the babes are amazing, the way they stare into your eyes, their exuberant smiles, how they begin each day all warm and sleepy, smelling of promise.

Letter from JULIA ROBERTS, read out on the Oprah Winfrey TV show to accompany the release of the first pictures of Roberts' twin children

A black hole uses gravity to create a rip in space time, warping space time. When I designed my Black Hole Terrace, I used gravity to convey this idea. I designed it in such a way that you fall down into the terrace that you eat on. It's not just a representational image, but presentational. In other words it's interactive. You fall into the black hole, through the event horizon carrying your dinner into the white hole at the centre, and into another space time.

CHARLES JENCKS
Building Design

There is a menace about [Wayne] Rooney, a sense of danger. He reminds me a little of Stan Collymore, which doesn't sound like a compliment, I know. But I remember Collymore at his best, a relish in terrorising a defence, a delight in exposing the weaknesses of an individual. I have seen a peregrine falcon fly into a great mass of birds and create mayhem; even when he misses, the falcon seems

confirmed in himself by the terror he inspires. There was something shark-like rather than falconine about Collymore. Rivaldo has the same kind of menace, still has on occasions, but he is more feline, panther-like. I like the idea of Rooney as one of the big, broad, burly, buffeting falcons, predators who love terror for its own sake and also for its devastating effectiveness as a tactic in the hunt.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

CONTRIBUTORS: C.J. Apperley, Karen O'Brien, Eddie Fiss, Craig Turp.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

TAX DODGING

We Shell not be taxed

FOLLOWING revelations last year of billions of pounds worth of overstated reserves and the consequent departure of chairman Sir Philip Watts, the oil giant Shell decided to reorganise its arcane management and share structure. The dual ownership of the group by Holland's Royal Dutch and the UK's Shell Transport would be replaced by a single unified holding company.

With such an upheaval under way, City analysts were relieved to see from the company's latest filing with US regulators that the restructuring, which in the company's words will "deliver significant benefits in the form of clarity, efficiency and accountability", appears to be on track for completion this summer.

Nobody, however, picked up on the unusual means by which Shell will achieve its unification. The new streamlined organisation will be headed by a public company called Royal Dutch Shell plc that is incorporated in Britain and primarily listed on the London stock exchange, but tax resident in Holland.

Strangely for a company that is turning over a new leaf and becoming more open, Shell gave no reason for this novel structure. So in the interests of clarity and accountability, the *Eye* looked at what Companies House records have to say about Royal Dutch Shell plc – and found that what will be the biggest company on the London stock exchange had very humble beginnings as an off-the-shelf company called Forthdeal Limited, incorporated in February 2002.

Its accounts up to the end of February 2004 show that it spent its first two years doing nothing but managing a few thousand pounds under the directorship of a Dutchman called Mr Kohlmann from an office in Amsterdam, for which service it paid around £300 per year (the going rate for administering a shell company).

But why should Shell, one of the biggest companies in the world, choose to transfer its thousands of companies, worth hundreds of billions of pounds, to an obscure outfit in the back streets of Amsterdam? Why not simply set up its own company, at the cost of a few pounds, and simply arrange for it to be tax resident in Holland?

The answer lies not in Britain or Holland, but in the many tax havens around the world where Shell has scores of companies paying little if any tax on their substantial profits. British tax law has long ensured that the profits of such subsidiary companies, to the extent that they are owned by UK tax-resident companies, are still taxed here. Mindful that British companies could get round this rule by moving their tax residence abroad (to a country like Holland with a more relaxed attitude to tax havens), in his 2002 budget the chancellor shut the loophole. Even if a British company moved its tax residence to another country, it would still have to pay UK tax on the profits it managed to stash in its tax haven subsidiaries.

The clampdown took effect from 1 April 2002 but was publicly known a few weeks before then. So if a company managed to lose its British tax status before then, it can now happily divert profits into tax havens without being troubled by the Inland Revenue ever again.

Setting up a stooge director, giving him a few pounds to play with and staging the odd board meeting is the classic way to establish a company's tax residence in a favoured location. In Forthdeal's case its accounts show that the amenable Mr Kohlmann from Amsterdam became the company's director on 18 March 2002 – two weeks before Gordon Brown's clampdown took effect – at which point the necessary formalities and therefore tax residence of the company moved to Holland.

All the while Mr Kohlmann would have been blissfully unaware that his company would become one of the largest in the world and probably would not even have known the purpose of the arrangement until, two and a half years later, in October last year, he was replaced by Shell luminaries including new chairman Joeren van der Veer, Sir Peter Burt (chairman of ITV) and Wim Kok (former head of the European central bank). The company then swiftly acquired its grandiose new name and the transformation was complete.

One group of people, however, knew exactly what they were up to with Forthdeal. Back in 2002, tax experts knew that any British company that moved its tax status before the April deadline to a country that didn't have the same rules for preventing tax dodging using haven subsidiaries would be immensely valuable at some point in the future for a Shell-like tax dodge. One firm that had this clever trick up its sleeve can be surmised from the registered office of Forthdeal, which just happened to be the Luton branch of… tax avoidance specialists Ernst & Young.

Thus one of the biggest business re-organisations in British history, designed to draw a line under one of the greatest corporate reporting scandals, has itself turned into a giant tax avoidance scam that is likely to cost the exchequer millions of pounds.

QINETIQ SELL-OFF

DERA at the price

A FULL sell-off of QinetiQ, the part-privatised former defence evaluation and research agency (DERA), looks imminent as the company goes on a charm offensive.

QinetiQ is 34 percent owned and operationally controlled by US private equity group Carlyle, following a rushed sale in 2002 that left UK taxpayers with £100m in liabilities while handing the American businessmen, advised by former PM John Major, a plum employing 12,000 people, including some of Britain's best scientists.

Now, 4,000 job cuts later, a full sale could raise as much as £1bn, with mega-payouts to the remaining employees who own 13 percent of the shares. The sell-off is likely to be worth more than double the firm's valuation when it was part sold to Carlyle and QinetiQ staff. Carlyle alone stands to gain around £150m, while top directors like chief executive Sir John Chisholm (pictured) will see huge jumps in the value of the shares awarded to them as a way of aligning their personal interests with Carlyle's.

The scale of the likely rewards calls into question the price paid for the shares in the first place. Back in December 2002, Tory defence spokesman Gerald Howarth described the sale as "a poor deal for taxpayers". Too true: but there's no sign of the MoD clawing any money back.

Government approval for the sale is still required, and QinetiQ is taking no chances. Executives were out in force to schmooze MoD officials at the PPP/PFI Global Defence conference at the Paris Intercontinental last month where they hosted a cocktail reception for the influential civil servants and defence procurement minister Lord Bach. And last year Chisholm helped treasury chief secretary Paul Boateng launch an initiative to "reduce barriers to commercialisation in the public sector". With his salary having almost doubled to £467,000 in the last couple of years, it's not surprising Sir John is so keen on the idea.

In the Back continues overleaf

CONSERVATION

Rubble with a cause

A HUGE wall of chalk, rubble, metal pipes, bricks and concrete has been put up along a crest of Sussex downland in an area of outstanding natural beauty.

At more than three feet high and 15ft wide (bigger in some areas) and running for more than half a mile along ancient downland tracks, the "Great Wall of Telscombe Tye" has been built in the name of... conservation.

This massive eyesore commissioned by the Sussex Downs Conservation Board (SDCB) was built without planning permission or, it seems, consent for the use of imported waste. Following complaints to the Environment Agency and the local authority from locals who enjoyed riding and walking over the sweeping downland to the sea, all work on the "wall" has stopped. But protesters say an abundance of flora and fauna has been buried under tonnes of material in what one described as a "massive act of vandalism".

Officially the wall is called "bunding" – supposedly small mounds either side of tracks, designed to keep vehicles off the grasslands. The SDCB's aim was apparently to deter joy riders, travellers and fly-tippers. But the SDCB and its local contractor, Wealden Environmental, are now accused of massive fly-tipping themselves.

Initially the SDCB told the local planning authority it intended the bunding to be no more than 18ins high and built from chalk and earth obtained from digging a small ditch alongside the tracks. That might have been all right. But it then decided it would be cheaper and less hazardous to walkers if the chalk was imported. However, it would only be cheaper if building site, rather than quarry chalk, was used, and it was brought in vast quantities from the site of an old hospital in Brighton. As the mounds grew, walkers found themselves confronted by bricks, rusty pipes, lumps of concrete, grills and wire. The size of the bund grew monstrously too and at some points it is impossible to see over.

Simon Culpin, senior ranger at the SDCB, told the *Eye* that contrary to the terms of the contract which specified the use of "clean chalk", some lorries had brought in rubble. He said work had already started to clean up the site before the local authority enforcement notice stopped work.

Keep off the grasslands

He said the SDCB was applying for retrospective planning permission and that once it was agreed, the contractors would be asked to take the top off the bunding and remove the debris. He claimed bunding on other sites was between half and one metre high and usually did not need planning permission, which is apparently why the SDCB didn't alert the local authority to its change of plans.

He accepted that while there may have been some temporary destruction on Telsombe Tye, the long term plan was to improve it for wildlife by ensuring sensitive farming without the use of chemicals and fencing and bunding to keep vehicles off.

A spokesman for Wealden Environmental, who refused to give his name, said the affair was nothing to do with the *Eye*, which was merely "stirring things up". When we explained that it had been drawn to our attention by villagers who were horrified at what had happened on the Tye, he said: "They are busybodies with nothing better to do and what you are doing is appalling."

He said the SDCB knew the chalk was coming from recycling processes and "there was bound to be the odd bit of debris in it".

The SDCB has tried to reassure residents that once the "offending material" has been removed and agreement reached with planners, wildflower seeding and grassing would mean the bunding blended into the downland. But residents who want the landscape restored to its original beauty are not convinced. Said Jackie Rowland, who used to ride her horse across the Tye before it became too dangerous: "If they get retrospective planning for a bund anywhere near its existing size, it will be a scandal. This must be the largest case of illegal dumping ever in any area of outstanding natural beauty by the very people who are supposed to protect it."

PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT

Countryside bombs again

IN THE last *Eye* we told how developer Countryside Properties' plan to build 650 homes and a children's nursery on the former site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory had been put on hold after an *Eye* investigation demonstrated that it was – perhaps not surprisingly – badly contaminated by asbestos.

This is not the only one of Countryside's projects that has run into trouble. In an "environmental statement" submitted with its application to build 600 flats on a former 16-acre timber yard in Hackney, east London, it seems a little confused about the presence of... four unexploded Second World War bombs. Countryside states: "The home office has confirmed that the remains of four unexploded bombs on the site were abandoned on 15 September 1945." This statement may seem unambiguous, but Countryside is not so sure. It continues: "The home office noted that sighting of UXBs at the time were difficult to substantiate and [*sic*] the fact that the authorities declared the bombs 'abandoned' as this term was used at the time to describe a failed search."

Later Countryside states: "In the case of unexploded bombs (which the presence off [*sic*] on the site can neither be confirmed or dismissed), physical investigation would be impractical... The home office has confirmed that the risk is minimal and in this instance and [*sic*] the vigilance of site workers would be important to ensure during ground works."

Workers on this site would indeed be wise to look out for Jerry bombs, because they are most certainly present. Far from "abandoned" referring to a failed search, it means what commonsense suggests it means – that bombs had been found but they had been too difficult to remove so they were left on the site – ie "abandoned". The ministry of defence knows where they are – bomb disposal experts attempted to remove them after they fell in 1940, and visited the site again in 1942, 1945 and 1949.

As for leaving the UXBs in place, when the MoD was questioned by the local *Hackney Gazette* it was unequivocal: "The bombs will need to be removed if six-storey buildings are planned because they will need to sink deep foundations." This seemingly obvious conclusion eluded Countryside, which has now belatedly stated that it will be employing specialists to oversee the removal of the bombs.

Oddly enough, no one knows why Countryside keeps referring to the home office: it's never had anything to do with bombs, unexploded or otherwise.

WATER BILLS

Washed-up watchdog

CONSUMER champion WaterVoice has been thoroughly wet at defending customers against the huge price rises introduced by water companies this month.

As bills sky-rocketed on 1 April, the watchdog was not exactly gnashing its teeth or decrying the spiralling water debt faced by the poorest households, despite the huge profits in the water industry.

Instead WaterVoice's public response was to advise customers to "negotiate more flexible and extended payment plans".

One popular "flexible" approach the water companies like to push is direct deduction from benefits or pensions. This means they can be sure of getting *their* full bite (of up to £8 a week in some areas) from even the most meagre incomes, no matter what other bills have to be paid.

WaterVoice also recommends that more people should take up the option of water meters to reduce their bills – even though a National Consumer Council report last year found that optional metering only benefits smaller, richer households and should be scrapped because it puts extra cost on the poorest people.

The rises, agreed in the Ofwat price review last year, may not have been as high as the water companies would have liked to help them make improvements to infrastructure. But they aren't short of a bob or two. United Utilities, Britain's largest listed water company, made pre-tax profits of more than £400m – up from £349m last year. Thames Water profits were around £650m.

NUCLEAR SAFETY

Bad to worse

FIVE years ago the partial privatisation of British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) was abandoned amid revelations of appalling safety standards and falsification of records on shipments of uranium and plutonium oxide headed for Japan.

The then trade and industry secretary Stephen Byers insisted that as long as such serious health and environmental concerns hung over the company, the sell-off could not go ahead. Now that BNFL has been restructured so that the profitable bits are teed-up for privatisation and a government-hired banker has been despatched to the city to find investors, as reported in *Eye* 1124, it might be assumed that the company's health and safety problems are behind it. But if anything, they are getting worse, according to an answer to a parliamentary question from Lib Dem environment spokesman Norman Baker.

Since the aborted sell-off in 2000 BNFL has been prosecuted under health and safety legislation 20 times, compared to six prosecutions in the previous three years. In other words it is now being prosecuted – for offences such as failing to register radioactive material and a couple of breaches of the "ionising radiation" regulations – twice as often every year as it was when Byers called off the privatisation because it was too risky.

Labour's approach to privatisation has obviously moved on considerably in the last five years; and trade secretary Patricia Hewitt appears to take an altogether more commercial view of matters than Byers did. It seems increasingly unlikely that a mere score of health and safety prosecutions will stand in the way of selling off one of the country's deadliest industries.

ASYLUM

Quotas for voters

THE case of Ernest Tientcheu (pictured), a human rights campaigner and political activist from Cameroon, demonstrates the home office's misplaced zeal in trying to meet "removal" quotas by returning genuine asylum seekers to dodgy regimes.

Mr Tientcheu was arrested, imprisoned and beaten twice in his home country before eventually fleeing to the UK in January 2002. The previous month he had arrived late at a political meeting and seen his friends and colleagues rounded up and taken away by the security forces. At the time he was on a list of potential witnesses in a human rights case that was being mounted against the regime of Paul Biya.

He immediately left his home, went into hiding and with the help of an uncle made his way to the UK on false papers and claimed asylum.

In the year Mr Tientcheu came to Britain, Amnesty International reported on continuing human rights abuses, extra-judicial executions and the detention, harassment and beatings of opposition activists and journalists in the west African state. A report from the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture said torture was commonplace there.

Despite the evidence, Mr Tiencheu's first appeal against the home office's rejection of his asylum claim was turned down on the grounds that the two campaigning groups to which he belonged, Poola'a and the Collectif Nationale Contre L'Impunite (CNI), did not exist. This was demonstrably wrong. Even the Amnesty report had noted the arrest and detention without charge of CNI representatives.

Mr Tientcheu was also refused permission to call supporting evidence from Brice Nitcheu, the founder of Poola'a and a fellow CNI activist, who had been imprisoned with him in 1997 and who had also since fled to the UK.

At Mr Tientcheu's second appeal, the error was accepted. But this time it was decided that while he may have belonged to the groups and may have been imprisoned and beaten in 1997 and 1998, because he hadn't fled at the time he could not have had "a genuine fear of persecution". Bizarrely, the tribunal reasoned that fear of a third arrest "was not serious enough" to justify his fleeing when he eventually did.

Since arriving in the UK Mr Tientcheu joined the Cameroon Diaspora Coalition (CDC), an opposition organisation in exile disliked by the regime at home. But because he did not mention this "at the first possible moment" – ie at an earlier hearing – that too has been rejected as a ground for asylum.

Last month his legal options ended with the failure of a final judicial review. The high court decided that his long list of asylum applications and failures meant he was "playing the system". Never mind that he was forced down that route because of initial poor legal advice and the failure to deal with his case properly at the outset. This time the home office argued that the CDC, set up in the UK in 2003 after his arrival, was merely a ploy to give Mr Tientcheu a claim. Yet the CDC already existed and is now a worldwide organisation. In the UK it has 20 officers and more than 200 members.

Mr Tientcheu, his wife Quinta, also a Cameroonian asylum seeker, and their baby Brenda now face an uncertain future. Yet many of his former colleagues, who suffered a similar fate in Cameroon, like Mr Nitcheu, have been treated sympathetically and granted leave to remain.

The great and good, including authors, bishops and Hilary Benn, his local MP in Leeds Central and the international development secretary, have taken up Mr Tientcheu's case. Benn has written to immigration minister Des Browne and is said to have made strong representations on compassionate grounds, while the Rt Rev John Packer, Bishop of Leeds, believes "there is a serious case for further review".

His parish priest, Father Douglas Emmott, and members of the congregation accompany him when he goes to sign on at the local immigration centre to show support and hopefully deter any detention and removal.

FURTHER EDUCATION

University of wails

SO MUCH for the freedom of academic thought and expression at the University of Wales, Swansea.

The concerns of lecturers and students over the vice-chancellor's plans to axe "unpopular" departments like chemistry, philosophy and sociology to promote lucrative managerial courses for foreign students have been met with an extraordinary use of internal disciplinary procedures, not to mention calls to Inspector Knacker.

The clampdown started with the arrest and suspension early last month of Colwyn Williamson, a well respected and long serving philosophy lecturer. He was one of the main authors of a complaint to the University's Visitor (a kind of ombudsman) about the cuts planned by vice-chancellor Prof Richard Davies and his managers; and a further complaint over Davies's appointment of his old mate and best man Prof Neill O'Farrell to head the new school of management at an annual salary believed to be around £105,000 (*Eye* 1102).

Williamson is suspected of hacking into the university computer system to gather evidence for his complaint, a charge he vehemently denies. But to the concern of fellow lecturers and students who are about to sit exams, he remains excluded from the university (though until Easter he continued to give lectures off-campus).

The move against Williamson was followed by a summons to the police station for student Cefin Hayward, under 1997 harassment legislation, over the placing of protest posters on the campus depicting caricatures of the vice-chancellor, with a pointy head and ears, and captions including such witticisms as "not as intelligent as he looks" and, on the appointment of his mate, "Yes, we have been personal friends for 30 years, but I didn't let that influence me."

Like Williamson, Hayward was also released without charge but he was warned about his future behaviour. There have also been arrests following student protest rallies, but they have not resulted in charges either. So why is the university calling in the police to deal with legitimate protest? And why is Inspector Knacker pandering to these requests?

Most recently student Jonathan Jones, a representative on the University Senate, was charged with the disciplinary offence of personally criticising the vice-chancellor after Prof Davies cancelled a senate meeting in the face of a student demo. Jones allegedly called the vice-chancellor a "coward".

If the draconian measures are designed to head off dissent, they are having the opposite effect. The Association of University Teachers is calling for Williamson's reinstatement; students are looking to sue the university for interrupting their studies ahead of exams; and the bizarre actions of the vice-chancellor are being added to a growing list of complaints to the Visitor.

Williamson is no stranger to ludicrous, heavy-handed university tactics (see *Eye* 829). He was one of three lecturers at Swansea who were suspended and accused of gross misconduct after blowing the whistle on the award of "degrees for fees". Degrees were being handed out to anyone who paid a substantial fee and wrote a thesis. In one case a "thesis" was copied straight out of a textbook. The three were cleared by a Visitor's inquiry, conducted by former high court judge Sir Michael Davies. He ruled that their allegations had substantial justification and they should be re-instated.

AIRPORT EXPANSION

Lifting the Lydd

A PROPOSAL to extend the runway at tiny Lydd Airport by 300m will make it possible to fly Boeing 737s and Airbus 320s in and out of Romney Marsh, allowing yet more low cost holiday flights.

Locals are appalled at the prospect, which follows the airport owners' announcement that they want to "advance the airport to two million passenger a year capability by 2010 or before". The plans are even more ambitious than those at Southend Airport to handle up to 40 passenger flights a day by smaller, 75-seater planes.

At present 125,000 people use Lydd each year, mainly flying to Le Touquet in France on 16-seater Trislander planes. Although permission for the extension has not yet been given, the draft South East Plan from the South East England regional assembly (SEERA) suggests approval is very likely. "The potential of Lydd airport is supported for smaller scale operation (up to two million passengers per annum)," says SEERA.

Locals fear that what seems like a relatively minor growth of tarmac now could open the door for huge expansion of the airport in future, and they want a public inquiry.

Romney Marsh, they point out, is an area of special scientific interest with three separate international designations for wildlife protection and an RSPB reserve in the Lydd area. In addition, slow, heavy, night-flying water birds present a particular risk of "bird strike", say campaigners, while the logistics of getting two million passengers to and from Lydd could cause serious environmental problems.

Reports by the department of transport in the run up to publication of an aviation white paper in 2003 said Lydd was too far from the road and rail network to be a good option for increasing flight capacity in the south east. Huge traffic congestion and massive road-building projects would have to follow any runway extension.

Environmental arguments aside, there is also disagreement over the number of new jobs the expansion would spawn to compensate for the decommissioning of the Dungeness power plant. Lydd Airport bosses say there will be more than 1,000 new jobs per million passengers. But campaigners point out that low cost airlines – the most likely operators – keep staff costs low. They say that at Stansted there are fewer than 500 jobs per million passengers and staff levels have dropped as passenger numbers have risen.

The proposed expansion could also impact on the local MP – one Michael Howard – who is backing the development. This leaves his Lib Dem and Green opponents to sweep up the many Conservative voters who are against an increase in air traffic around their homes.

In the City

"WHAT about the workers?" was never a sentiment that echoed around the boardroom of MG Rover after supposed saviour John Towers and his partners rode into Longbridge five years ago.

That the company has now collapsed leaving 6,000 employees probably jobless and with a large potential hole in their pensions, while Towers & Co count up to £40m for an initial investment of £10, should come as no surprise – especially to *Eye* readers.

The Rover "rescuers" never hid what they were taking out of the hugely loss-making group. All of which may make talk by chancellor Gordon Brown of an investigation little more than a face-saving device to help nervous West Midlands Labour MPs. Phoenix Venture Holdings, which owned MG Rover, was a private company and as such the director/owners were able treat the company as a personal piggy bank so long as they broke no company laws and made full disclosure.

Little better illustrates the essential for MG read "My Greed" selfishness of the Phoenix directors than the vexed issue of pensions which may have been the deal breaker for the Chinese government and Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation who did not want to be left holding that bag. The new MG Rover pension fund had a £68m deficit on its liabilities of £401m at the end of 2003. Both figures could be larger now.

But since Towers and four friends took over in 2000 they have paid at least almost £17m into their own personal pension scheme or more than £3m each. During that same period the company paid only £49m into the employees' pension fund, or some £8,000 for each current employee. This disparity was most starkly illustrated in 2002 when the directors provided £13m to kick off their new nest egg compared with the £11m paid into the company pension fund for the entire workforce. And that in a year when the new accounting regulations and the fall in the stock market saw the deficit in the MG Rover pension fund balloon from £1m to £73m!

But that was all there for Brown and the hapless trade secretary Patricia Hewitt to see if they bothered to look. But they always took a hands-off approach until it was too late. After all, the Towers rescue had been blessed by Hewitt's predecessor Stephen Byers as a good deal in preference to the rival Alchemy bid with its guaranteed job losses. So it was somewhat difficult to denounce the men who had been lauded as saviours only a short time earlier.

Also highly visible for those who wanted to see was the "Me First" eagerness with which the Towers consortium started extracting money from MG Rover even before they set up their pot of pension gold which started MPs and trade unions questioning their motivation in 2003.

In its first 20 months of operations to December 2001 the consortium members paid themselves some £7m, as well as engaging in a series of beneficial transactions between themselves and the company they had supposedly rescued – details first disclosed in *Eye* 1070. That pattern was repeated in every successive year and by 2003 £31m had been paid out under the guise of salaries, pensions, interest and loan note repayments.

At the last minute Towers and Co generously offered to put back £10m in return for £100m from the taxpayer. Whether that was a real offer and on what terms was never tested because the Chinese by then had walked away. Even the hopeless Hewitt realised that there could be no taxpayer bailout without the directors putting their hands in their own full pockets. But desperate to avoid a Midlands meltdown among already disillusioned local Labour voters, the trade secretary has now pumped in £6m to pay wages while the directors sit on the sidelines counting their money.

Towers and Co claimed they deserved to be rewarded for taking on the "risk" of buying Rover and investing a claimed £60,000 of their own money. But this ignores the huge dowry provided by BMW for taking Rover off their hands which essentially removed any risk. And proof that there was no risk is shown by the money extracted before the collapse and the substantial Rover assets, such as property and the MGR Capital car leasing operation, which have been ring-fenced from the Longbridge losses.

The structure of those transactions and much of the inter-company transactions within the Phoenix Venture Holdings group is likely to be put under the microscope by administrators PricewaterhouseCoopers. If, as seems likely, MG Rover goes under, all payments and asset transfers made since 2000 are likely to be closely examined by the administrators on behalf of creditors to see whether the directors obtained any illegal or preferential benefit.

Sadly, the fate of MG Rover is very much a death foretold. From the beginning there were those in the motor industry and the City who queried that it could be saved – and in particular that it could be saved by John Towers.

They pointed to his far from impressive record at diesel engine component makers Concentric which he took private in a 1999 management buy-out after three years in charge (*Eye* 1002). Since 2000 the story at Concentric, where Towers remained as deputy chairman after a further reorganisation, has been more of the same, much to the presumed irritation of the venture capitalists at Bridgepoint Capital who backed the buy-out.

For 1999 sales were £59m and profits almost £3m. The next year sales rose to £64m and profits were still £2.4m even after interest payments of almost £2m. By 2002 sales were down to £60m and the group lost £1.3m. Towers resigned from most of the underlying Concentric subsidiaries in 2003 when there was a further loss of £420,000. Last year the group was in the black again making £2.2m – less than it had been making five years earlier!

It has emerged that the Chinese rescue deal for MG Rover started to fall apart as soon as its advisers were given full access to the books after months of negotiations. But then Towers and his team have never been quick about revealing the MG Rover numbers. The accounts were filed at or after the 10-month deadline laid down in company law. But then bad figures and information always takes longer to provide than good.

BMW, which went to great lengths to protect its former Rover employees through providing funding and preferential deals for the Labour government preferred new owners, saw what Phoenix did at Longbridge as the "unacceptable face of capitalism". However, unless PwC can do anything about it, MG Rover will turn out to have been a sweet ride for the "My Greed" directors unlike for the employees, suppliers and owners. As the *Eye* predicted in December 2002: "Even if it all ends in tears John Towers and friends have already made a remarkable return on that £10."

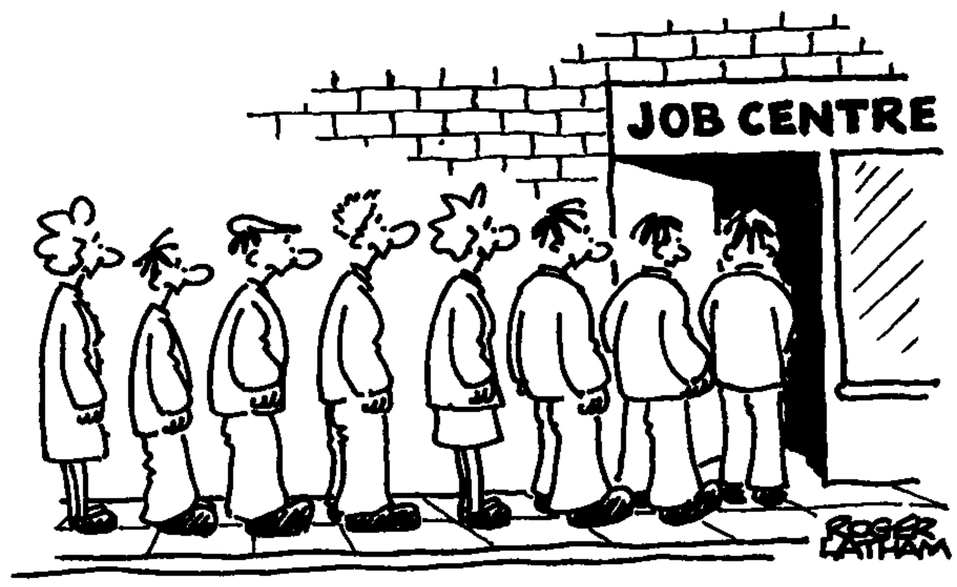
HAVING escaped criminal prosecution in Germany for the "Dr Evil" euro-bond trades last August, Citigroup traders are also expected to get off lightly when the Fundamentally Supine Authority gives its verdict on the scandal which also occupies regulators in France and Italy.

The expectation is that the FSA will bring no disciplinary proceedings against any of the traders involved in the €16bn deals which produced profits of €17.5m within minutes. Citigroup traders first pushed bond prices up on the electronic EuroMTS market by bidding up option prices before dumping huge quantities of 13 government cash bonds and then buying back selected bonds.

The FSA is expected to exact a very large fine on Citigroup which is used to such penalties by now given recent punishments on Wall Street and in Japan. Fines may also be in order in Germany and probably also in France and Italy, although there a prosecution for market manipulation may still be possible.

Belatedly Citigroup suspended five traders but had signalled that it would fight any market manipulation charges. However, the FSA is said to have already indicated that it does not hold any individual liable for this blatant, bonus-driven ramp!

Instead it will force Citigroup to once again take out its cheque book. The fine could exceed the previous record for market manipulation – £900,000 on ABN Amro in 2003. But fines are just a business expense to the masters of the universe. A lesson the FSA seems unable or unwilling to learn.



The Assembly Line: New Rover

JUST how accountants Ernst & Young would pay an award of $2bn or even a tenth of that to Equitable Life is far from clear, which may explain why the case over the terminal "black hole" in the pension providers' accounts rolled into court this week. How long it may stay there remains to be seen with legal costs for the loser expected to approach £100m if the case runs to Christmas.

So far the two sides are too far apart for a deal; but that could all change once the bluffing ends and the evidence starts. Only when the taxpayer is picking up the tab can cases run and run oblivious to cost as is the case with the BCCI/ Bank of England action already into year two. The case against auditors Coopers & Lybrand brought by the Barings liquidators started then settled.

Ernst & Young UK carries a provision for only £17m in accounts covering all claims. On top of that insurance cover is provided, it says, "principally" through E&Y's worldwide network of partnership which control captive insurers such as Jancap Insurance with which it has another £20m on deposit. A "significant" portion is then reinsured.

Just how much cover that provides in total is unclear; but it is thought unlikely that any payment beyond £250m would be payable without great difficulty for the partners.

DEATH erases many unpleasant events when it comes to the obituaries of politicians. Those who regaled us with the achievements of

"I'm selling Rover to the Chinese"

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Compass caters to the boss

Winners and losers over the past year at catering giant Compass Group...

+ £2.5m	...Shareholders
...CEO Michael Bailey*	– £2.35bn

*Including the usual share and option gifts and a £1m salary

Unit Trust
All Stocks Guilt
All Stock Index Linked Guilt
Legal & General

Lord "Sunny Jim" Callaghan were a perfect example.

Sadly there was no space among his many achievements to recount his influential role in building the reputation of the Bank of Conmen and Cocaine International – the greatest bank fraud in history. BCCI founder and arch-corrupter Aga Hasan Abedi soon identified the former Labour prime minister as an ally. He paid for a researcher and gave generously to a Callaghan charity. In return Callaghan became a trustee for Abedi's Third World Foundation and a goodwill ambassador for the bank. He sported a BCCI badge at the 1988 International Monetary Fund conference. Such political friends persuaded the Bank of England and other regulators to turn a blind eye to BCCI's activities.

Most importantly, in 1990 – a year before it collapsed – Callaghan defended BCCI in the House of Lords following the bank's conviction in Florida for drug money laundering. An event which should have cost the bank its licence. "I have no hesitation in saying that in my judgement they are certainly people of the highest integrity and probity," he declared!

Nor was Abedi the only dubious banker the former chancellor backed. Callaghan was a director and shareholder in the Commercial Bank of Wales founded by his old friend and benefactor Sir Julian Hodge – the Usurer of the Valleys who died last year.

In 1981, despite the presence of Callaghan, the Bank of England initially refused to license the Commercial Bank of Wales (now the Bank of Wales) as a bank because it had "not achieved sufficient reputation and standing". The Bank of England later relented as it did fatefully over BCCI to whom it also initially denied a banking licence.

But all of this was far too long ago for the obituary writers to recall or maybe it was just bad taste to remind readers.

'Slicker'

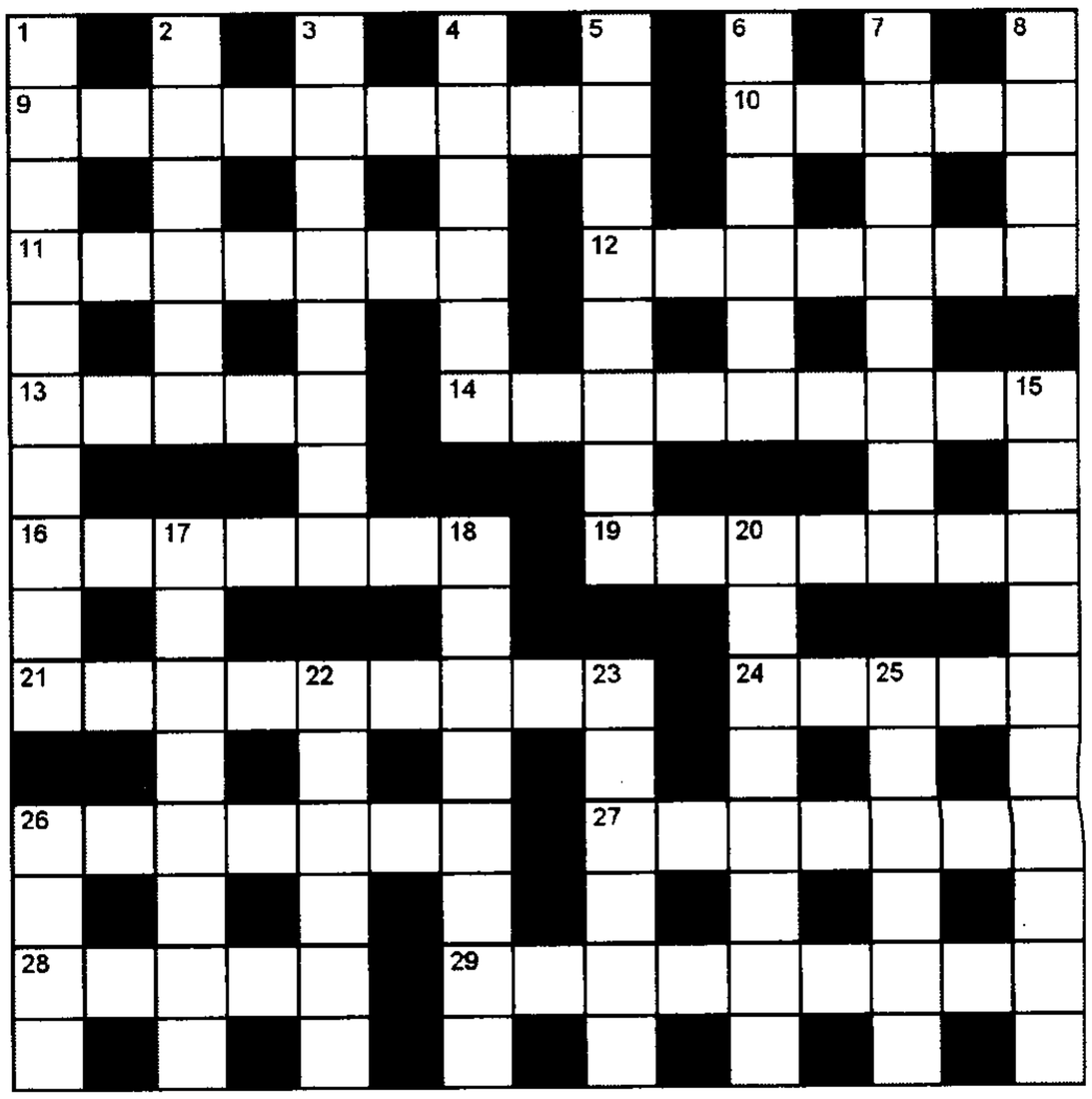
JUST FANCY THAT!

"And right now there is a big demand for rental property in the centre (of London)."
– *Sunday Times* property section, 3 April, page 54, col 5.

"There is a 'substantial oversupply' of rental properties in central London."
– *Sunday Times* property section, 3 April, page 54, col 6.

EYE CROSSWORD 285

by Cyclops



£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 22 April 2005.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk

ACROSS

9 One onto Charlie's game: "Stupid git's a defender of the faith?" (9)

10/27 Saucy *Eye* feature: 'Ten nameless men Horatio screwed' (2,3,7)

11/28 Some of Wimbledon's stock bullshit? (1,4,2,5)

12 Like Kate Moss: no good in Laura's new creation (7)

13 Bangs Ted, loses plot, resulting in unsettling feeling (5)

14 Money-maker Brenda's bloomer? (5,4)

16 Party that makes you puke three different ways! (5-2)

19 Sort of theatre pit associated with France's extreme right wing candidate (7)

21 Testicle removed – a hindrance appreciated by the vegetarian? (3,6)

24 King George into 'new black' (5)

26 Earl's broadcast stream of piss, possibly used by high-flying executives (7)

27 See 10

28 See 11

29 What did you say? Have another orgasm? (4,5)

DOWN

1 Fruity thing – could have you on your back in no time (6,4)

2 Bye bye Jewish prick when church ousted by ring (2,4)

3 Shagged to death on society engagements such as these? (3,5)

4 Cover boob by arse-over-tip official (6)

5 Wait a minute, Tony's pissed about Conservative's last poster (6,2)

6 Branson's thing: kicking arse for Lake poet (6)

7 *Sun*: "Big One On Stud!" (8)

8 Piss-artist in the Lords? (4)

15 Gathering of politicians: tense males, undistinguished on the inside (3,7)

17 Guts involves embracing Right (8)

18 One lot misrepresented and framed by tabloid images, but it's what MPs are all about (8)

20 Peter familiarly 'gobbling' in the manner of the eastern city (8)

22 Peacekeepers quite ugly (6)

23 Members' exaggerated representations – most crap – about Lawrence (6)

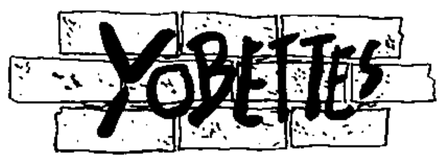
25 Bang? Lola snapped, " – hasn't got an earthly!" (6)

26 Grease is needed to make Lulu better! (4)

Crossword 284 winner: CATHY HOWARD

ACROSS: 5 Beeb 6 Bride-to-be 9 Claptrap 10 Euro MP 14/18 Jack shit 16 Reign 19 Royal wedding 23 Horses 24 Well-knit 25 Snowballs.

DOWN: 1 Keep on 2 Crap 3 Udders 4 Starkers 5 Balmoral 7 Bumf 8 Archer 12 Ariel 13 Biennial 15 Kurosawa 17 Needle 20 Yes-man 21 Diktat 22/26 Cornwall 24/11 Walk down the aisle.



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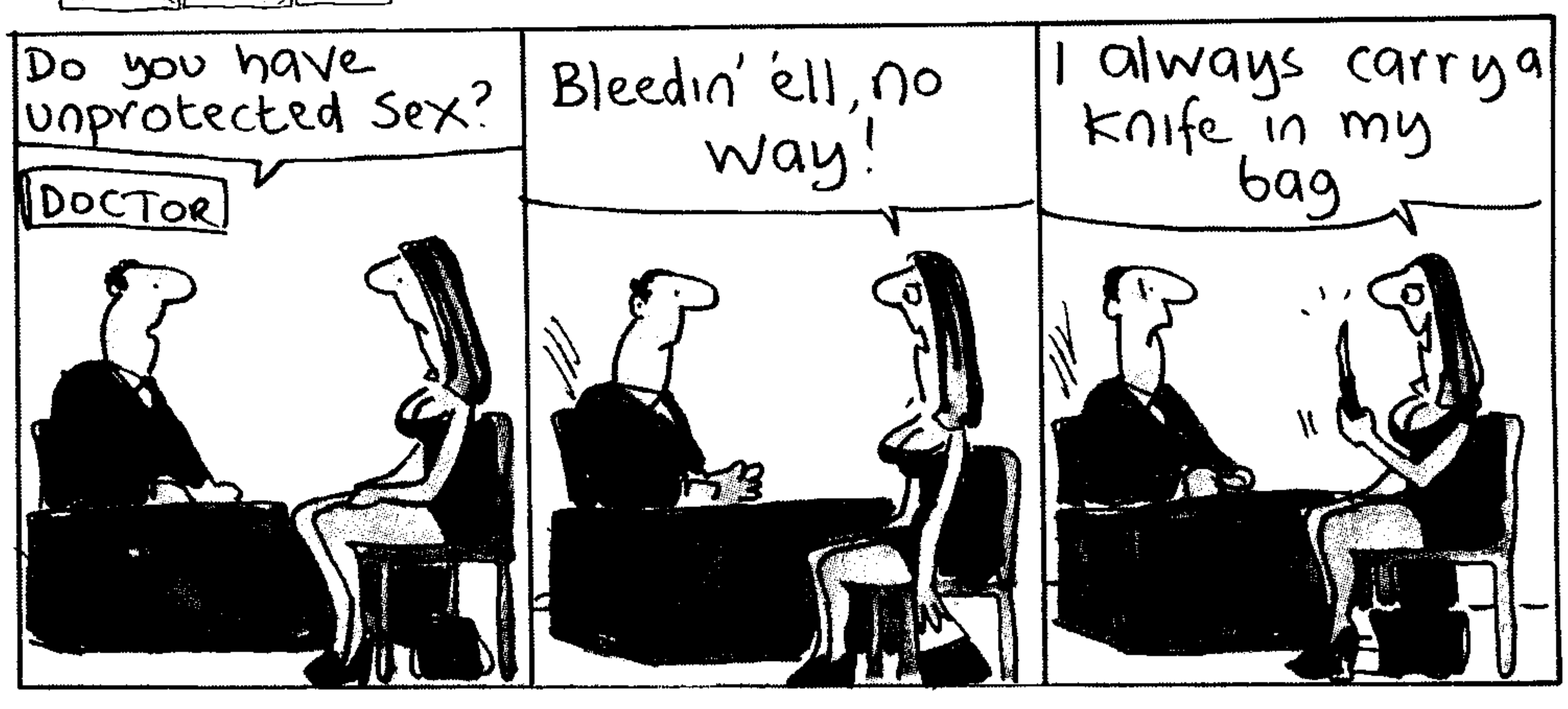

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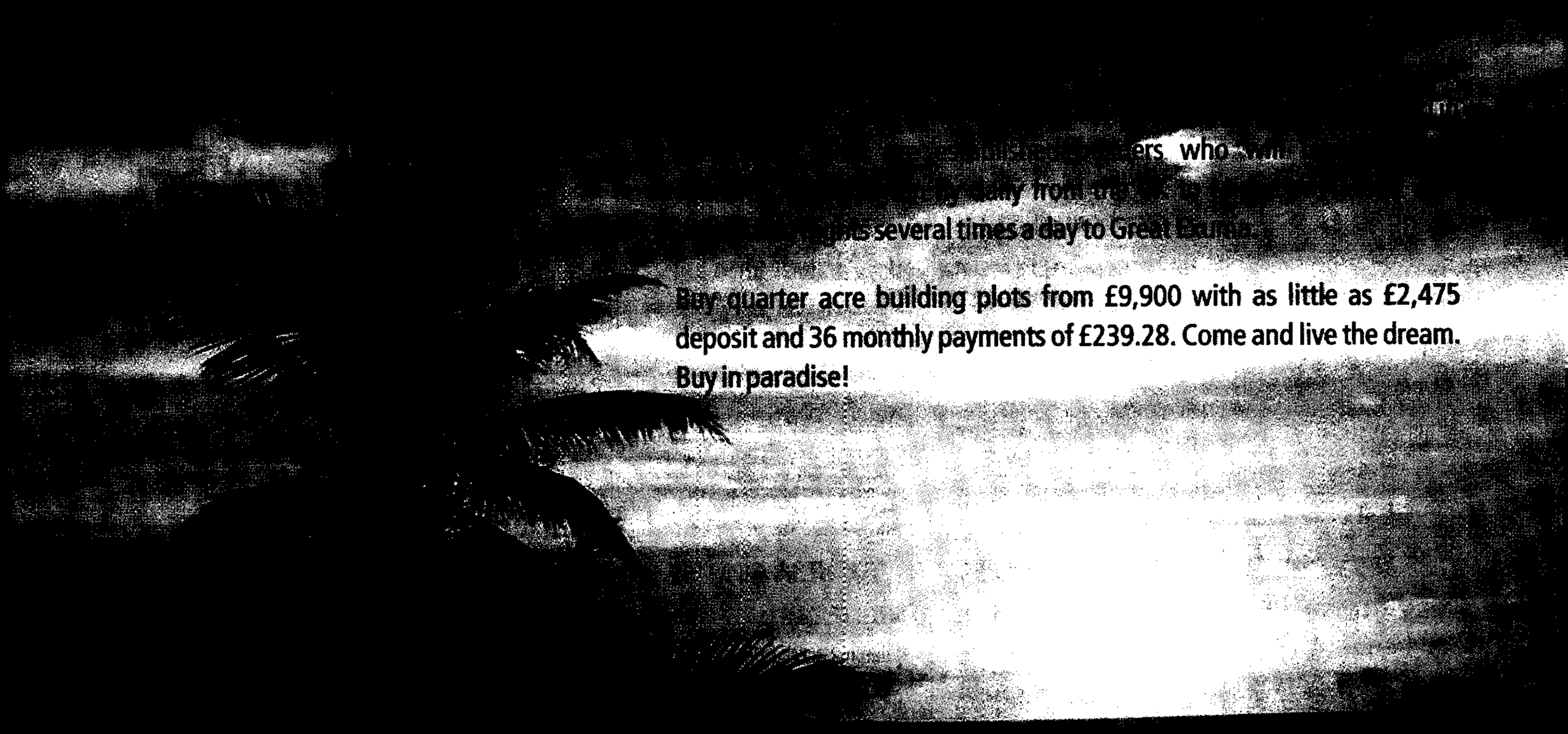
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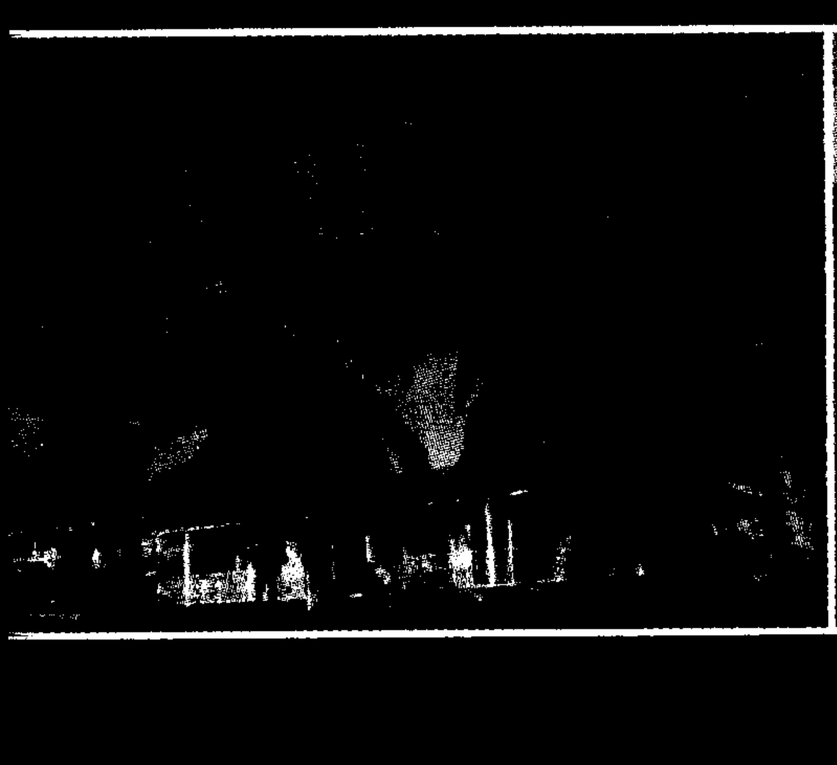

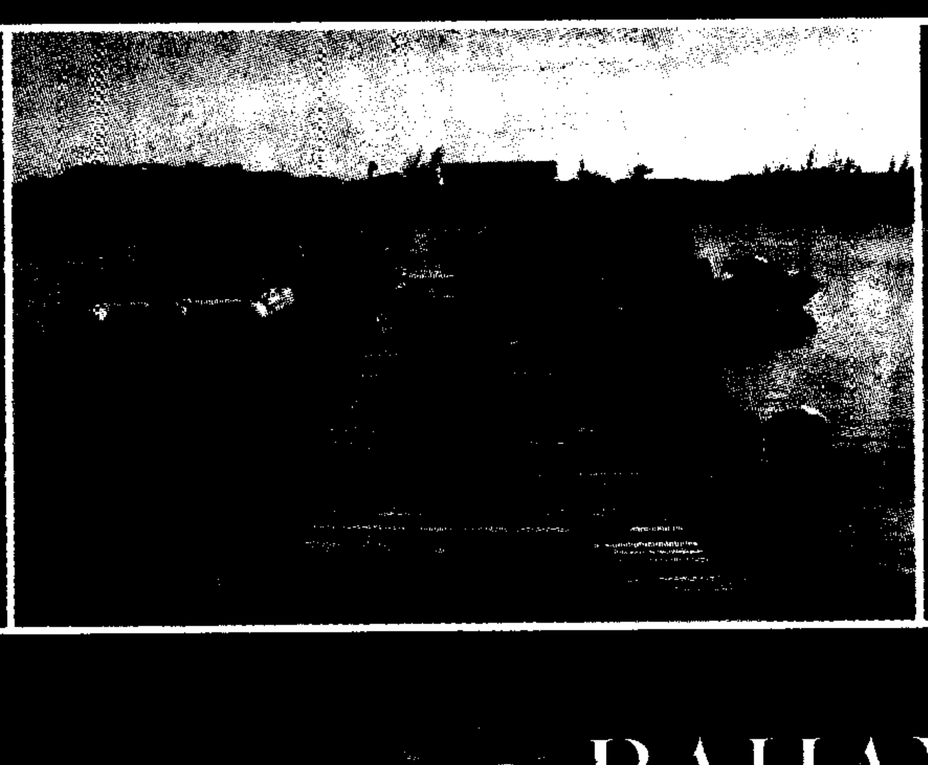

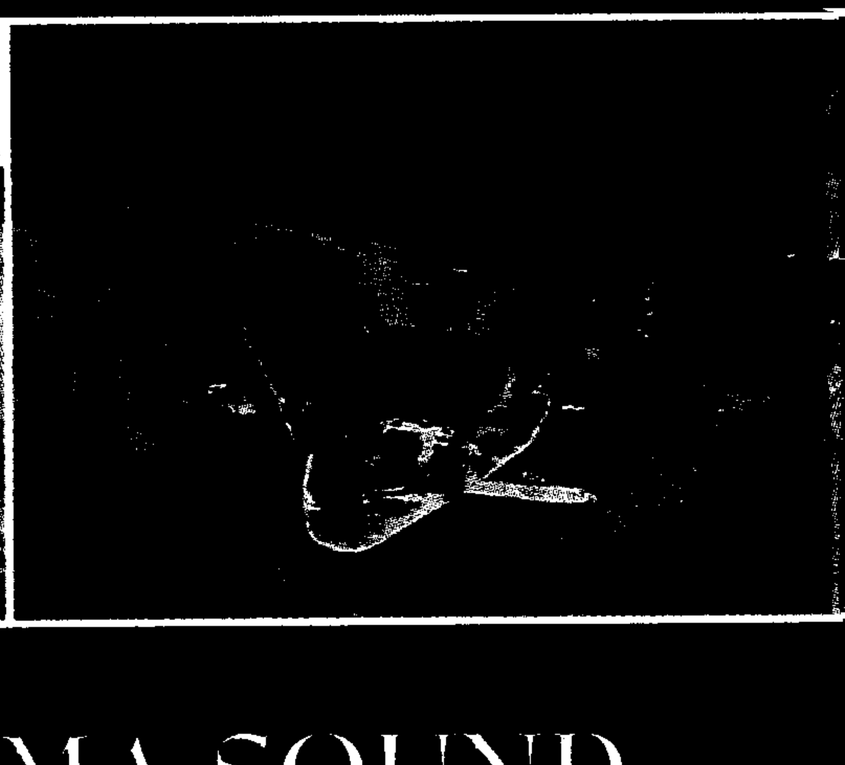

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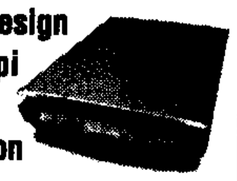

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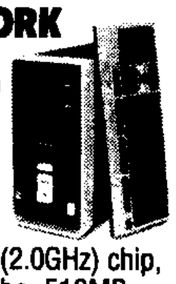

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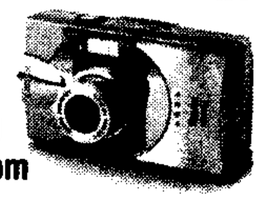

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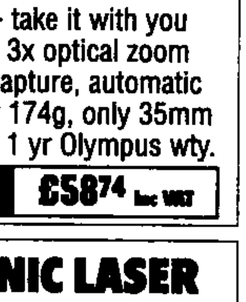

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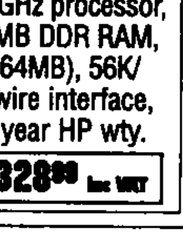

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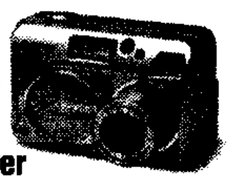

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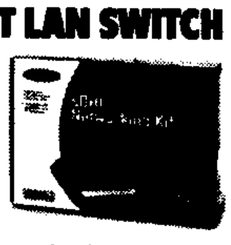

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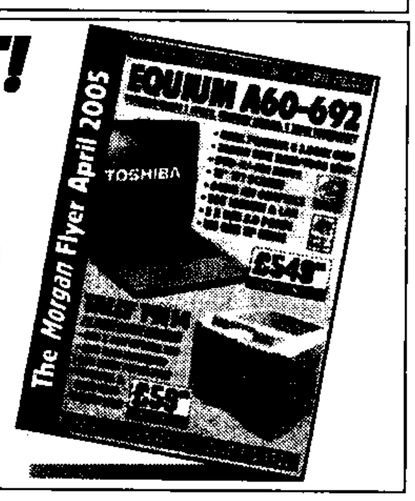

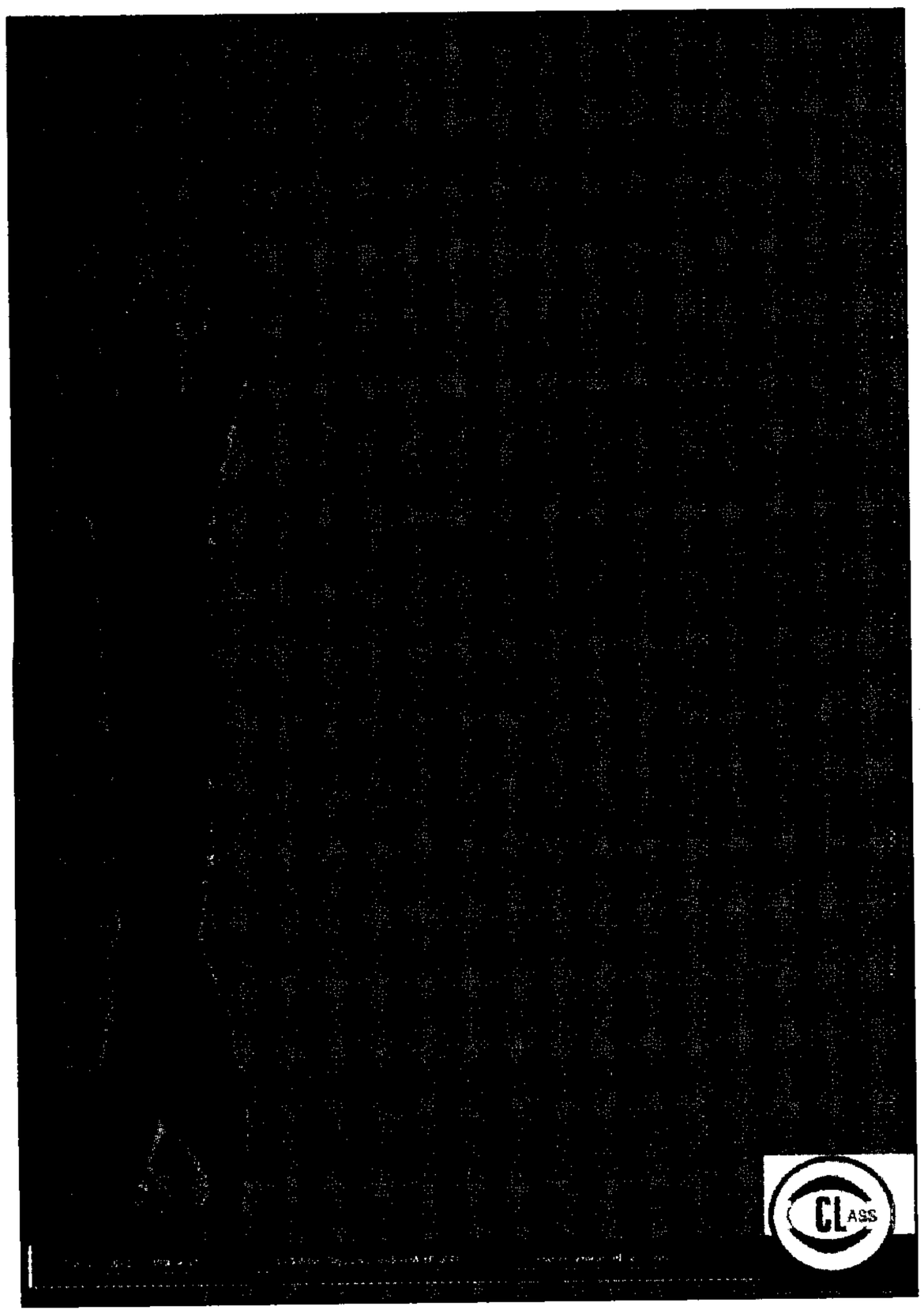

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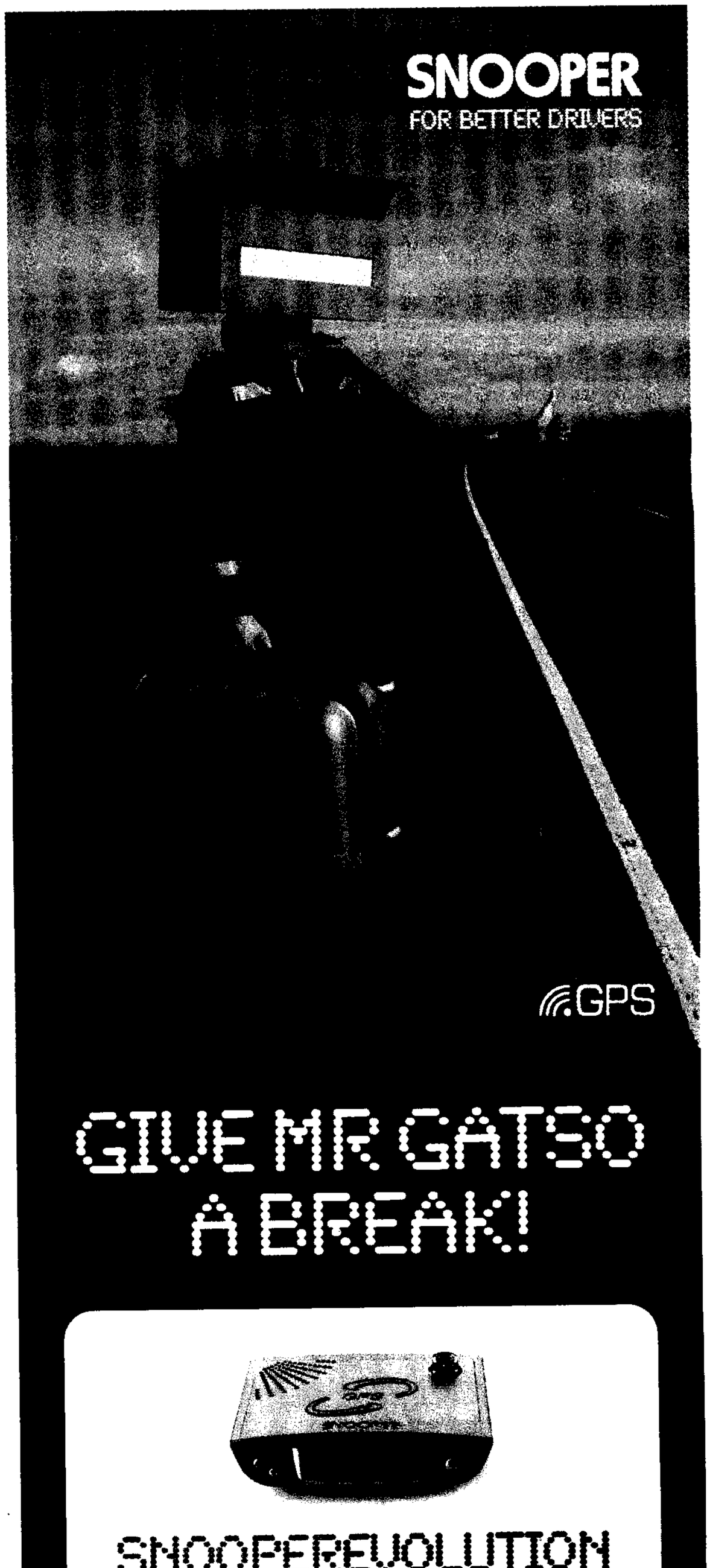

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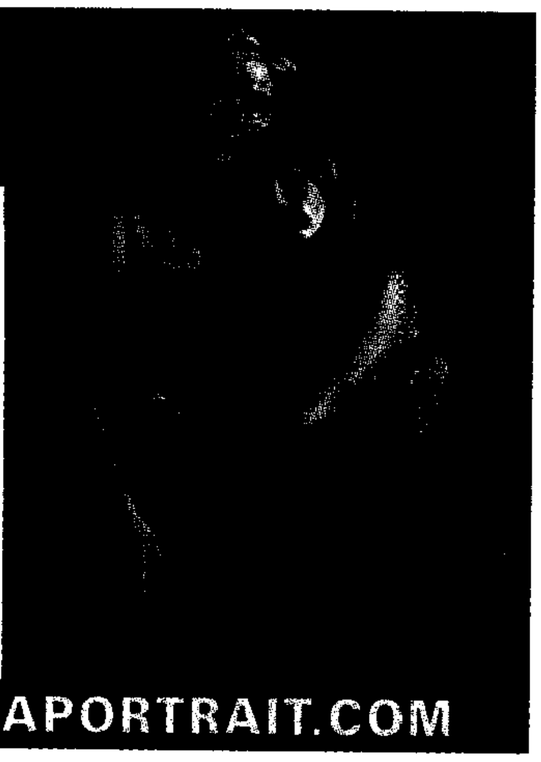

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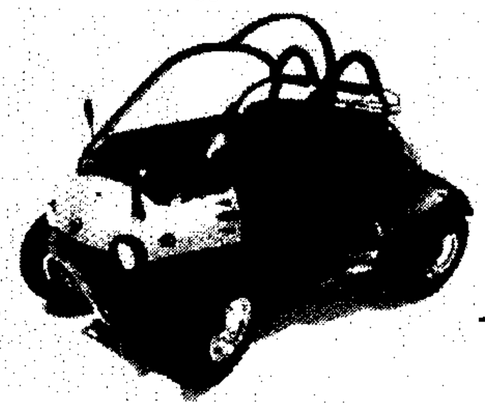

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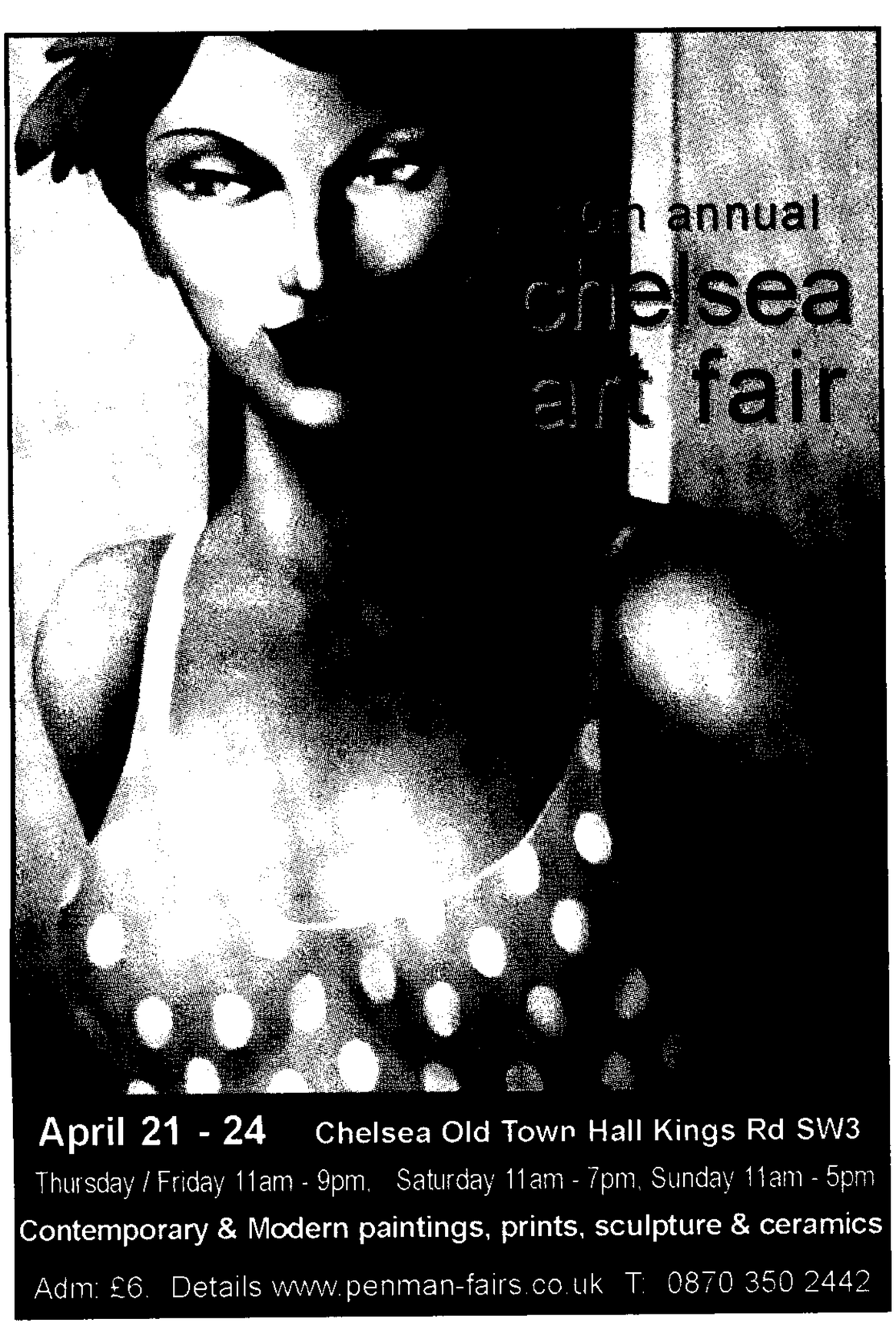
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EYE SAY

SPEECHWRITING by Britain's leading professional, Mitch Murray – see page 34

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DEFROCK BLAIR for his Terror Acts. See how at NewLabourNaziScum.Org

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PHILANTHROPIC EXPERIMENT. Help me clear some business debt, surplus to charity. S/C: 08-92-86. A/C: 82322450.

HELP PLEASE. Mounting debt, new child, broken car. Need approximately 15K. Thank you. HSBC, S/C: 40-33-33. AC: 71627651. dickindebt@yahoo.co.uk

I NEED 15K to help me out of a tight situation – thanks for caring. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 52476449.

WON COMPETITION with business idea on BBC 2 Working Lunch. Need benefactor to help set up initial investment for stake in business. Struggling single parent of 2 and a committed Christian.manibron1@yahoo.co.uk

SPIRALLING POST-STUDY DEBTS, plus credit cards, bank loans totalling 48K. Not earning enough for repayments. Please help: I'm desperate. S/C: 40-31-06. A/C: 81668633.

£10,000 needed for an extraordinary project in Atlas mountain village. Life-changing. Thanks. A&L, S/C: 72-58-10. A/C: 2811334630.

CAN'T WORK (FIBROIDS) waiting for operation. Can't get mortgage insurance. Please help. Abbey, S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 22238439.

PSYCHOLOGY STUDENT needs help to learn how to help others. S/C: 20-44-86. A/C: 60437697.

NOT DYING OR DESTITUTE, but doggedly saving for dream trip Down Under! Any donations definitely appreciated. A/C: 23710144. S/C: 60-15-31 NatWest.

WORLDFAMOUS PYROTECHNIC ARTISTS, relocating to countryside, seek pyrophillic investor. Capital for property share / offers. invest@theworldfamous.co.uk

HOPELESSLY IN DEBT, divorced, suicidal mother, please help. Thank you. S/C: 11-08-75. A/C: 00158449.

ZIMBABWEAN RETURNEE FAMILY restarting life. Financially desperate. NatWest, S/C: 50-41-06. A/C: 12418056.

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JAPANESE, feminine, 50, seeks gentle, honest, sincere, hardworking, well-educated male. churchjunebride@yahoo.co.uk

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GORGEOUS BLONDE, 31, sophisticated, sexy, naughty but nice, seeks presentable gentleman for friendship, maybe more. Wealth is a bonus but soul is more important. allanahtl@yahoo.com

MALE, HANDSOME, 38, ex rugby player type seeks passionate woman for daytime liaisons, south. skyrocketjim@yahoo.co.uk

LOVELY PARIS-BASED academic would like to meet someone not married for carousing and more serious interests. Reply Box 128034.

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NOT ENTIRELY HIDEOUS and really quite successful male writer would like to meet intelligent, sensitive and, of course, hugely sexy woman, 45 to 55 to share wine, food and laughter and no doubt traumas too. I'm in London, where are you? halpen567@aol.com

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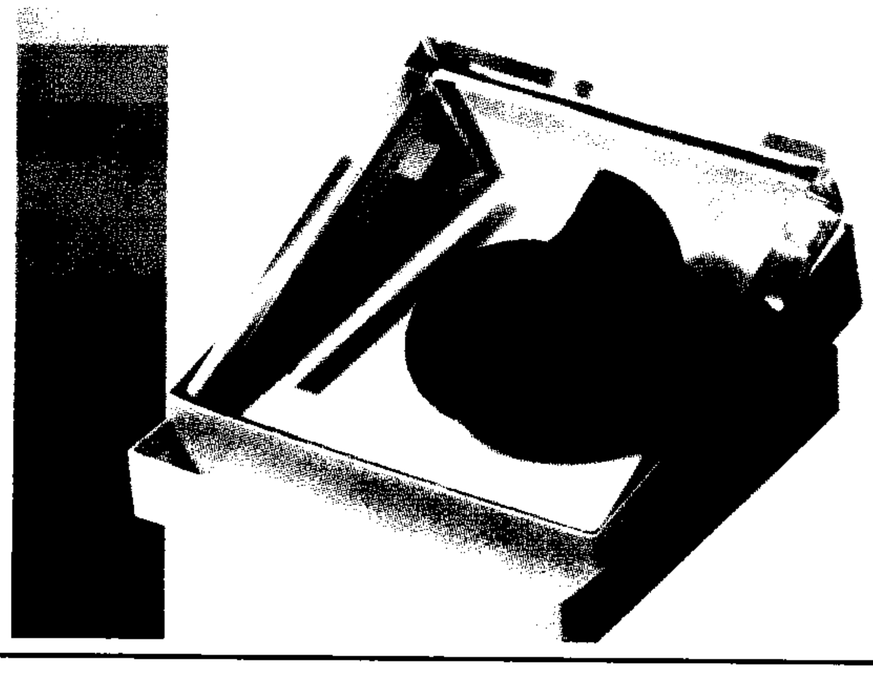
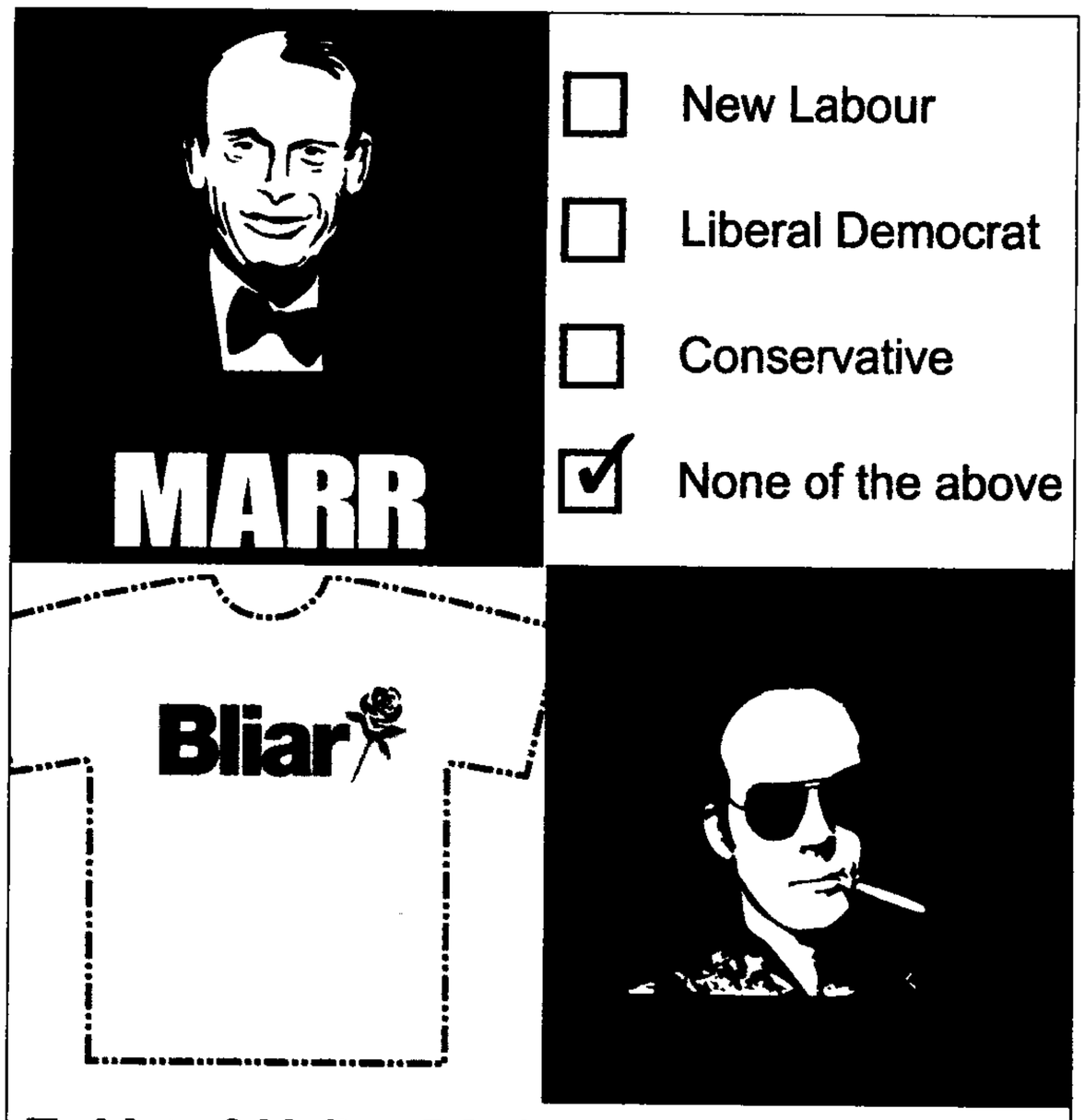
They are revered in Asia as both an 'Amulet' with the power of protection, and a 'Talisman' with empowering abilities. Each ammonite gift comes with a guarantee of authenticity and there is also a dedicated website with more information about ammonites and Madagascar www.madagascarammoniteart.com. Alternatively, telephone 01243 537037 for further information.





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OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit
A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the-peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off-the-peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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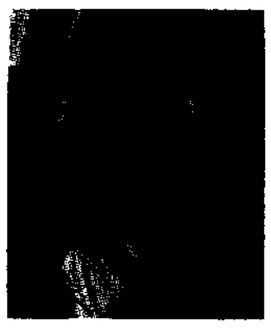


You savour delicate musical nuances in places where you couldn't before. And when you're not listening to music, you can use them to quietly enjoy a little peace. Clearly, Bose QuietComfort®2 headphones are no ordinary headphones. It's no exaggeration to say they're one of those things you have to experience to believe.

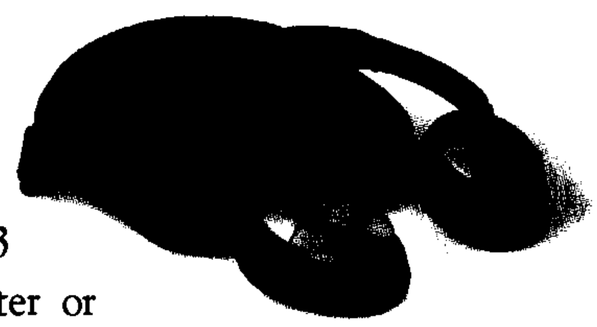
Reduce noise with Bose technology. *Time Out London* called our original noise-reducing headphones "positively sublime." And according to respected columnist Rich Warren, our newest headphones "improve on perfection." They electronically identify and reduce noise while faithfully preserving the music, speech or silence that you desire. As *The Scotsman* reports, when you switch on the noise reduction "what happens is remarkable... your world becomes a quieter, more lovely place."

Use them as a concert hall – or a sanctuary.

Presenting The Bose® QuietComfort®2 ACOUSTIC NOISE CANCELLING® Headphones.

Enjoy your music with our best headphone sound quality ever. After trying QuietComfort® 2 headphones, *Esquire* reports that this is "One of those products you have to experience to truly appreciate." The sound is so clear, you may find yourself discovering new subtleties in your music. *Exclusive Homes* says that the "Audio quality is superb. As virtually all exterior noise is reduced, clarity of the music or speech you are listening to is massively enhanced."

***Stuff* magazine gives these headphones five stars** and calls them "the kings of silence." *NWA World Traveler* reports they "simply take the work out of listening, especially in noisy environments." And *TravelPlus* says they're "incredibly comfortable, too, creating a sense of personal space." You can wear them without the audio cord to reduce noise. Or, attach the cord and connect them to a portable CD/DVD/MP3 player, home stereo, computer or in-flight entertainment system. When you're done, their convenient fold flat design allows for easy storage in the slim carrying case.



Try the QuietComfort®2 headphones for yourself satisfaction guaranteed. We don't expect you to take our word for how dramatically these headphones reduce noise, how great they sound and how comfortable they feel. You really must experience them to believe it. Call FREE to try them risk-free for 30 days in your home, at the office or on your next trip – satisfaction guaranteed. If you aren't delighted, simply return them for a full refund.

Call FREE on 08000 85 85 72, today. These headphones are available directly from Bose. When you call, ask about our convenient payment plan which lets you make **four equal payments over a period of up to 10 months with no interest charges from Bose.*** Pay either monthly or quarterly, the choice is yours. Discover a very different kind of headphone, from one of the most respected names in sound. The Bose QuietComfort® 2 ACOUSTIC NOISE CANCELLING headphones.

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